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THE USE OF PERSONAL DOCUMENTS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

BY

GORDON W. ALLPORT

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL
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THE USE OF PERSONAL DOCUMENTS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

Prepared for the Committee on Appraisal of Research

BY

GORDON W. ALLPORT

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL

230 PARK AVENUE · NEW YORK

The Social Science Research Council was organized in 1923 and formally incorporated in 1924, composed of representatives chosen from the seven constituent societies and from time to time from related disciplines such as law, geography, psychiatry, medicine, and others. It is the purpose of the Council to plan, foster, promote, and develop research in the social field.

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Foreword

THE BOOK that lies before the reader attacks a double problem central not only to social psychology but to much of all social science: What materials tell us what goes on in people's minds? How are valid generalizations to be made on the basis of such materials?

To understand man in society it is apparent that we must come to know the mental states of particular men in particular societies. But the ways we have of learning these mental states are not, we feel, adequate, and we encounter difficulty in devising ways to test conclusions based on the evidence we have as to mental states. The situation

> . . . suggests something in the nature of a dilemma. On one hand, the study of social life seems to require the understanding of the factor of human experience. This subjective aspect must be secured. . . . Studies which confine themselves to "objective factors" remain inadequate and one-sided. Yet the identification of the human experience or subjective factor, seemingly, is not made at present in ways which permit one to test crucially the interpretation.

The words quoted were written by Dr. Herbert Blumer, and have reference to this central problem as it arose in his evaluation of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki as a product of research in social science.[1]

The work of Thomas and Znaniecki represented a turning point in the development of social science method. Blumer summarizes the contributions made by *The Polish Peasant* to social science under eight heads of which the first two are "(1) a demonstration of the need of studying the subjective

[1] Blumer, Herbert. *Critiques of Research in the Social Sciences: I, An Appraisal of Thomas and Znaniecki's 'The Polish Peasant.'* New York: Social Science Research Council. Bulletin 44. 1939. Pp. 79-80

factor in social life; and (2) the proposing of human documents as source materials, particularly the life record, . . ."[2]

The human document, also called the personal document, received its first significant critical attention as a broad and important class of social science research material in *The Polish Peasant*. Blumer defines the human document as "an account of individual experience which reveals the individual's actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life."[3]

With this may be compared the similar definition by Allport in the Preface, p. ii, of the present work. It is in large part through the human, or personal document, that we learn what goes on in people's minds. Their use has grown greatly since 1920, when the last volumes of *The Polish Peasant* appeared; such materials are common in research in several departmentally distinguished fields of social science; considerable experiment has occurred in the collecting, evaluation or analysis of such materials; and there is now much reflection upon methodological problems connected with their use.

The present volume records one of a series of steps taken or planned by the Committee on Appraisal of Research of the Social Science Research Council in carrying out its mandate to appraise research in discharging "the Council's responsibility for the improvement of the quality of research in the social sciences." The committee (then under the chairmanship of Edmund Day), first brought about the writing of critical analyses of certain published works in social science selected as of outstanding importance by representatives of the disciplines in which the works fell. *The Polish Peasant* was one of these works. The committee next arranged oral discussion

[2] *Op. cit.* P. 81
[3] *Op. cit.* P. 29

of each of three of these works and of the corresponding critical analyses. There resulted three publications, the record of three of these analyses-and-discussions.[4]

While continuing the development of this form of appraisal of research, the committee then initiated another series of examinations of matters of social science method. Because of the crucial importance of the problems attending the use of the personal document, as revealed in connection with appraisal of *The Polish Peasant,* it was decided to appraise the use of personal document materials in social science fields since the publication of that work. For this group of enterprises, the Blumer report becomes Exhibit One, and the present monograph, Exhibit Two.

The committee has under preparation additional reports of memoranda on the use of personal documents in certain other social science fields. These, it is expected, will be published later by the Council.

Furthermore, the committee, its mandate later having received a broader construction, is carrying on, as a part of its appraisal of the use of personal documents, what might be called experiments in method. It has been arranged that the same selected collection of personal documents be made the basis for scientific conclusions by two or more investigators working separately and independently. The experiments under way vary the test situation in one particular or another. In one experiment the separate investigators use the same set of categories for analyzing the same documents; in another, each develops his own categories; in a third, the different element of method is in the use or nonuse of a formalized rating

[4] Blumer, Herbert. *Op. cit.* Bye, Raymond T. *Critiques of Research in the Social Sciences: II, An Appraisal of Frederick C. Mills' 'The Behavior of Prices.'* Shannon, Fred A. *Critiques of Research in the Social Sciences: III, An Appraisal of Walter Prescott Webb's 'The Great Plains': A Study in Institutions and Environment.* New York: Social Science Research Council. Bulletins 45 and 46. 1940

scale. It is planned to bring together in a single volume the results of these experiments.

The completed experiments, together with the reports of recent use of personal document materials in several of the social sciences, should give a clearer appraisal of the nature of a large area of social science research, and should record the progress made in two or more decades in improving methods in that area.

The committee believes Dr. Allport's monograph to be a penetrating and significant review of its subject. Indeed the work does more than justify its title, for the reader will find an examination of methodological questions that stand large not only in psychology but in all the social sciences.

ROBERT REDFIELD

Chicago
January 1942

Preface

A DECADE OF DEPRESSION, war, and misery has had one benign effect. It has brought out upon the center of our cultural stage the struggles of the common man, the picture of his daily life, his courage, all his homely values. It has brought the documentary film into popularity, the public opinion poll, radio programs dealing with the common man's life—sidewalk interviews, "we the people"—candid cameras, autobiographies that give unaccented accounts of ordinary experience (*These are our lives*). Journals like *Life* and *P M* have sprung into being with their featuring of the ordinary soldier, the ordinary baby, the ordinary school girl. The layman has become interested in the *personal document;* and so too has the social scientist, caught up in the general cultural tide.

But unlike the layman, the social scientist knows that he is being affected by the prevailing winds, and he asks himself whether it is a healthy sign. Becoming methodologically-minded (as he does at the slightest provocation) he seeks to evaluate the increasing flood of personal documents that reaches his hands.

While he contemplates the matter he feels himself afflicted with a vertigo of contradictions. His scientific training and aspiration create doubts and misgivings concerning the representativeness of any *single* case and especially concerning the validity of *subjective* records. But at the same time he acknowledges to himself that in the single case confronting him he finds the vivid and irreducible stuff that constitutes such knowledge as to him is immediately certain and trust-

worthy. As compared with the generalized canons of his science he finds the case document more absorbing, more enlightening, and fundamentally more real. One investigator enthusiastically declares that personal documents offer the perfect method for the social sciences, while another insists that they are unworthy to be called scientific. Yet another contradiction lies in the fact that, though the general climate of opinion is against their use, at the same time their use is rapidly increasing.

The personal document may be defined as *any self-revealing record that intentionally or unintentionally yields information regarding the structure, dynamics, and functioning of the author's mental life.* It may record the participant's view of experiences in which he has been involved; it may devote itself deliberately to self-scrutiny and self-description; or it may be only incidentally and unwittingly self-revealing.

Defined in this way, personal documents comprise only one class of *case study* materials. Although case studies (or life histories) *may* be written in the first person, more frequently they represent the attempt of an "outside" investigator to depict the essential structure and functioning of some other personality by recording as many of the environmental and intrapsychic conditions as are necessary to yield an understanding of the personality in question. A consideration of all third-person case documents would necessarily include the whole realm of biography, medical, and institutional records, clinical accounts, and innumerable varieties of psychograms, portraits, and descriptive sketches. Fortunately, our assignment is limited to first-person human documents (written or spoken self-revelations) to which the psychologist applies his analytical skill. The documents may treat only single episodes of experience or fragments of a

life history, or they may deal comprehensively—even from birth to old age—with all accessible and important aspects of one human career as seen from the "inside half."

As a self-revealing record of experience and conduct the personal document is usually, though not always, produced spontaneously, recorded by the subject himself, and intended only for confidential use. Its themes naturally revolve around the life of the writer, its manner of approach is naturally subjective (phenomenological). Such documents vary greatly in candor, scope, authenticity, and psychological value. Sometimes they are deceptive and trivial; but sometimes they represent distillations of the most profound and significant experiences of human life. And always they are interesting to the psychologist who must ask even of the deceptive and trivial documents why they were written and, further, why they are dull or deceptive.

Although many of the methodological problems of first- and third-person documents are identical, some are not. Institutional records, social case histories, psychiatric anamneses can be written without the aid of the subject; but the subject himself must take part in the preparation of a personal document. Of the five classes of human documents employed by Thomas and Znaniecki in *The Polish Peasant*—autobiographies, letters, newspaper accounts, court records, and the records of social agencies—only the first two qualify as personal documents. Biographies and all other third-person documents comprise an important chapter in psychology. However, they raise problems regarding sources of material, observer reliability, and techniques of presentation peculiar to the third-person document. These are not considered in this monograph. First- and third-person documents, however, both find themselves in one common methodological quandary: they both deal with the *single case* and on this question

will stand or fall together. Since they have this basic affinity it will not greatly matter that I have confined myself to an inspection of the role that the first-person document plays in psychological science. If we find this role justified, we shall have validated in essence the use of third-person documents as well.

Our survey and evaluation are based upon a reading and analysis of the investigational and critical literature in this field. To every separate investigation the following schedule of questions, so far as it was at all relevant, was applied: (1) With what sort of first-person material is the study concerned: comprehensive autobiography, topical autobiography, artistic production, diary, letters, verbatim records—or what? (2) What is the history of the documents employed? Were they written for an audience, on order, or without thought of publication or use? And how were the documents acquired by the psychologist? (3) Does the document (or do the documents) stand alone, or is it supplemented by other material? If the latter, is the supplementary material used for confirmation, contrast, as groundwork for generalization, or for what purpose? (4) Are there attempts to establish either the reliability or the validity of the document? If so, what? (5) What statement does the investigator make about his method, about the value of his material? (6) Does the investigator use the document inductively or as illustration for an hypothesis, theory, or dogma; or does he do both? Are his inferences limited specifically to the case in question, or generalized to apply to "types" or groups of people? (7) What is the bias or frame of reference of the investigator, and how does it seem to influence the interpretation? Do the interpretations seem compulsory, plausible, or strained? Do the investigator's comments clearly draw their meaning and intelligibility from the personal document, or does the document take on meaning

and intelligibility only in the light of the comments and interpretations?

In practice this schedule was found to be too searching. To only a small proportion of the studies could all of these questions be profitably applied. But even though the schedule yields no tables of results, it serves none the less as a framework for the whole inquiry and especially for the valuations presented in Part III. For the most part, investigations employing personal documents are conceived loosely and executed in a pedestrian fashion. While perhaps two or three hundred psychological authors have employed personal documents, scarcely more than a dozen seem to have given thought to the method they employ. The few critical studies that exist are reported in Chapter 2.

In the course of the project generous assistance has been given by Ada Allport, Jerome Bruner, Dorothy Delabarre, Irmgard Norden, Helen Rich, Walter Solmitz, and Frederick Wyatt. John Arsenian has rendered indispensable aid, contributing much to both the content and the form of this report. To all these collaborators I wish to express my thanks. Some of the conclusions here presented are derived from seminar discussions extending over two semesters in the Department of Psychology at Harvard University. It was the enthusiastic response of the students and the quality of their contributions that persuaded me to attempt the present formulation of the problem. Finally, I feel a debt of gratitude to the Social Science Research Council for providing the immediate incentive and opportunity for preparing this report.

GORDON W. ALLPORT

Cambridge, Massachusetts
October 1941

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Part I

The Use of Personal Documents

Chapter 1

Uncritical Use

MOST PSYCHOLOGICAL WRITERS who employ personal documents do so uncritically. Not that their use of them is necessarily inexpert or naïve; but their concern is exclusively with the living, graphic portrayal of the mental life of their subjects, and less, or not at all, with modern scientific standards of sampling, validity, observer reliability, and objectivity. The authors dealt with in this first chapter, for all their skill and brilliance in the employment of personal documents, had little concern with methodological issues.

ORIGINS

In a certain sense nearly all of the classical productions in psychological science are but the personal records of their authors. Goethe's *Farbenlehre* is nothing more than an account by an intellectual giant of his private, perceptual experience. Helmholtz in his incomparable *Physiologische Optik* wrote little more than the autobiography of one pair of eyes; and, even later in the laboratory era, Ebbinghaus' extraordinary experiments were almost exclusively a record of his own mnemonic abilities and of his enviable patience. Although these, and most other, classical productions in psychology are in a sense nothing more than personal documents, they certainly were not regarded as such by their authors. It was assumed that the introspective deliverances of the philosopher-psychologist were necessarily infallible,

and that they were sufficient and typical for mankind at large.

This age of dogmatic phenomenology passed directly and suddenly into the experimental period, the transition being speeded by Wundt's peculiar genius, and by the prestige of evolutionism which directed attention outward toward other organisms. It might be supposed that the collection and analysis of uncontrolled protocols (personal documents) might have formed a steppingstone from the armchair to the laboratory; but such was not the case. The pendulum swung abruptly from reliance upon dogmatic phenomenology to controlled experiments upon the "other one."

After the experimental age had come with a rush, the experiences collected under laboratory conditions were expected to demonstrate the same uniformity and typicality as had been presumed in the work of the phenomenologists. Diversity and disagreement among the observers gave the investigator difficulty, and at first he was inclined to exclude deviants or to average them together. Soon, however, these subterfuges failed to satisfy. Individual differences became too insistent. It was then that preoccupation with the normal-average-adult-human-mind to some extent broke down, and in the final years of the century the concepts of variety, range, distribution, and clinical type came into favor—and with them the use of case studies and personal documents. Galton, for example, in his discussion of imagery (83) included excerpts from personal reports written by his friends and acquaintances.

Thus the origins of the personal document in psychological science may be said to lie primarily in (1) the tradition of phenomenology and introspection which produced the great foundation stones of mental science; in (2) the growing influence of biological positivism that required the use of subjects (other organisms) for study and in (3) the discovery and featuring of individual differences in the late nineteenth

century. With these major lines of influence lesser trends seem to have converged: (4) the flowering of interest in morbidity and genius, with its emphasis on autobiographical materials and in its case reports—Krafft-Ebing (114), Lombroso (127); (5) the development of the psychological novel (Eliot, Dostoevsky, Melville); (6) the breakdown of Victorian reticence and taboo upon the revelation of intimate feelings in letters, diaries, and autobiographies—Havelock Ellis (66), Bashkirtseff (20).

It was these conditions that set the stage for the first great book in psychology to rest its case entirely upon the use and interpretation of personal documents.

WILLIAM JAMES: *THE VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE* (1902)

The developments sketched above undoubtedly influenced James to plan his Gifford lectures around paragraphs and sentences drawn from the personal confessions of "great-souled persons wrestling with the crises of their fate." But special additional influences were likewise present. Starbuck (169) in the Nineties had assembled a rich collection of autobiographical reports on religious experience and had made these documents available to James.[1]

[1] When Starbuck entered the questionnaire field he did so without the entire approval of James who, in his preface to Starbuck's book, wrote that this method "of collecting information had already in America reached the proportions of an incipient nuisance in psychological and pedagogical matters." But even though James distrusted the method he felt that "Dr. Starbuck's questions were peculiarly searching and intimate," and he declared that his own skepticism was overcome by the excellent results obtained. Starbuck collected topical autobiographies in response to a printed questionnaire-guide. His treatment of the material (192 documents in all) is in terms of tables and percentages from which he sought inductive generalizations. His discussion of the pitfalls and safeguards required in research of this type is noteworthy for the period in which he worked. Indeed it is not strictly accurate to mention Starbuck's as an "uncritical" study, for his is among the first critical discussions of the method. It is interesting to note that Havelock Ellis (66), dealing in the middle Nineties with topical autobiographies of sexual inverts, also wrote cautiously regarding the method. But unlike Starbuck, he found generalizations from his materials impossible.

James felt that he might put his developing presuppositions of radical empiricism to test by drawing upon the self-reported religious experiences of thoroughly religious people describing their most acutely religious moments. It would profit us little, he insisted, to study religious life at second hand. Only a search for the original states would disclose "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (100, p. 32). Had James regarded himself as a deeply religious man, he might have adopted the complacent method of the earlier phenomenologists, but with humility and simplicity he reports that he is shut out from the enjoyment of mystical states almost entirely and can speak of them only through the words of others (100, p. 370).

There seem to be still further reasons why James took to the personal document. Previously (in the *Principles*) he had defined psychology as the science of *finite individual minds,* but he had allowed himself to follow the prevailing current of emphasis upon *mind-in-general.* Now in the *Varieties* he seems to want to see what finite individual minds are really like at their more complex levels of integration. Kernels of pluralism are present in the method he adopts. An Hegelian absolutist would be unlikely to trouble himself with a finite life history, but as a pluralist James believes that no one sees further into a generalization than his own knowledge of particulars extends.

For all these reasons James sought out the *documents humains* which he found "not in the haunts of special erudition, but along the beaten highway." Listening receptively to their eloquence he fashioned a masterpiece of descriptive science. An inductive temper pervades the volume even though the author fully appreciates the individuality of every

case.[2] Out of his material he drew his famous types of religious mindedness: the sick soul (who must be twice born), the healthy minded (who is once born), and the divided self (in whom the saintly and worldly ideals pursue a feud). From the raw material James evolves likewise four basic constituents of saintliness, and six levels of asceticism. These and other classifications, as brilliant as any ever achieved in the psychology of religion, are inductive, and comprise what the author modestly calls his "crumb-like contribution to individual types of character."

What is most important for our purpose is the fact that James felt himself inevitably driven to employ personal documents as the most feasible method of approach to the psychology of religion. No other method seemed to him available for discovering the fundamental ways of men coming to terms with the universe.

G. STANLEY HALL

G. Stanley Hall, another psychological humanist, was also employing personal documents in the Nineties. He felt particularly that the experiences of adolescents are so transitory and easily forgotten, that knowledge of the teen-age should be obtained through diaries and autobiographies.

The very fact that the writings of adolescents tend to be extravagant in their emotional coloring, signified to Hall that conscious fantasy as recorded in documents "provides a harmless vent for tendencies that would otherwise cause great trouble if turned to practical affairs" (86, Vol. I, p. 537). In *Adolescence* he quotes from document after document—Goethe, George Sand, Helen Keller, John Stuart Mill, Anthony Trollope, and others. Of Marie Bashkirtseff he writes:

[2] "So many men, so many minds: I imagine that these experiences can be as infinitely varied as are the idiosyncrasies of individuals." (100, p. 399)

She, who may be taken as one of the best types of exaggerated adolescent confessionalists, was of rich and noble birth, and began in 1873, at the age of 12, to write a journal that should be absolutely true and frank, with no pretense, affectation, or concealment. . . . The journal continued until her death at the age of 23. It may be described as in some sense a feminine counterpart of Rousseau's confessions, but is in some respects a more precious psychological document than any other for the elucidation of the adolecent ferment in an unusually vigorous and gifted soul. Twice I have read it . . . with growing interest. (86, p. 554f.)

Of Goethe he writes:

Perhaps no one ever studied the nascent stages of his own life and elaborated their every incident with such careful observation and analysis. (86, p. 581)

And of Pierre Loti's *Story of a Child,* although written in Loti's old age and not factual in nature,

It is one of the best of inner autobiographies, and is nowhere richer than in the last chapters which brings the author down to the age of fourteen and a half. (86, p. 588)

Of the entire problem, Hall concludes:

It is, I believe, high time that ephebic literature be recognized as a class by itself, and have a place of its own in the history of letters and in criticism. (86, p. 589)

He recommends further that young people should be encouraged to keep confessional private journals to teach them self-knowledge and the art of self-expression.

But in spite of his enthusiastic endorsement of literary autobiographies, Hall maintains that

all these biographic facts, (derived from autobiographies) reveal nothing not found in questionnaire returns from more ordinary youth, so that for our purposes they are only the latter, writ large because superior minds only utter what all more inwardly feel. (86, p. 563)

This statement means that Hall regards his earlier questionnaire method as sound, if less dramatic, in its capacity to elicit information of personal development.

Hall's collections of questionnaires are a slightly more

controlled species of personal document. They are topical reports on such limited subjects as experiences of anger (87) or of fear (88). Questionnaires he sometimes supplemented with the method of compositions called for from school children. In his study of fears he presents 900 brief protocols obtained from seventeen hundred subjects, and groups the reports into a classification of 25 types of fears. From the protocols and from the classification he presumably derives a phylogenetic hypothesis to the effect that all manner of fears are unhappy residues of ancestral times. But nothing in the documents themselves compels such an interpretation; the classification is inductive, but not the interpretation.

SIGMUND FREUD

Freud was partial to the personal document, and his position as pontiff of psychoanalysis did much to exalt this source in the eyes of his followers. The personal document is, after all, a natural outgrowth of a clinical situation in which the patient is always encouraged to speak for himself.

Freud did not always feel that he needed to know a patient personally in order to diagnose and to analyze. Among the more famous of his analyses on the basis of documents are his treatments of incidents from Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (77), of Jensen's novel *Gravida* (81), of the autobiographical writings of the paranoiac Schreber (80).[3] In this last case he obtains supplementary information from the

[3] Interesting, too, is Freud's endorsement of the *Tagebuch eines halbwüchsiges Mädchens* (195), presumably written by a young girl between the ages of eleven and fourteen and a half. Freud finds it "artless" and a "gem." "Above all," he adds, "we are shown how the mystery of the sexual life first presses itself vaguely on the attention, and then later takes entire possession of the growing intelligence, so that the child suffers under the load of secret knowledge but gradually becomes enabled to shoulder the burden."

The authenticity of the document has been disputed ever since its original publication in 1919. The editor died shortly after the publication and was not able to meet the charges against it. This document will be referred to again in Chapter 8.

physician in charge, but, deprived of other sources, he relies upon the self-revelation of such documents as are available to him.

Typical of Freud's attitude toward all his studies is his statement in connection with one particular case cited in the *New Introductory Lectures:*

> If we had to deal with only *one* case like that of my patient, we should turn away from it with a shrug of the shoulders. It would not occur to anyone to base a belief which has such far-reaching implications on an isolated observation. But I can assure you that this is not the only case in my experience. I have collected a whole set . . . and I have the impression that in every instance . . . (79, p. 62)

Thus Freud seems to regard the single case as an exemplification of general truths known to him through his acquaintance with many cases. This attitude is characteristic of clinicians who, although they often cite a single instance, do so because they regard it as typical of many.

Unlike James, Freud does not first present his cases and then draw his conclusions. He seems to use cases as exemplifications of theories previously formed. No doubt his frame of thought is changed by the admission of a new case, but so far as the *present* case is concerned, each patient seems to exemplify and illustrate (and not to create) his theories. This criticism may be extended to the very large literature of psychoanalytic cases (many based upon the analysis of personal documents): the delicacy and individualization that so often marks the analyst's treatment of the patient in the therapeutic situation seems commonly to be lacking in the discussion of the case in print. The case appears forced into the economical mold, and the individuality of the patient seems to be suppressed. That is why the non-Freudian reader finds the published interpretations strained and forced, while to the inner circle they seem to be not only acceptable, but even compulsory.

A final word of praise should be spoken concerning Freud's high regard for professional ethics in the use of personal documents. He repeatedly warns his followers against breaches of professional secrecy. The anonymity of a case, he insists, should be scrupulously preserved.

A MIND THAT FOUND ITSELF AND THE LITERATURE OF SUFFERING

One of the most influential books in the entire history of psychology is a simon-pure personal document standing by itself without the benefit of editing or interpretation. In 1907, shortly after recovering from a manic-depressive breakdown which necessitated months of institutional treatment, Clifford Beers (21) wrote the vivid and absorbing story of his experiences. This document led directly to the founding of the mental hygiene movement in America, and to the elimination of many of the institutional evils depicted in the story. The book itself has gone through 17 editions, 25 printings, and three translations. The fact that it was written in the white heat of reminiscence, during a second mild return of the manic phase of the psychosis, does not in the least detract from its essential authenticity or from its immeasurably beneficial influence.

For our present purposes the important fact is that this well-known document utilized no independent sources of information, failed in any formal sense to establish its reliability or validity, failed to demonstrate the representative character of the experience, and yet with all these limitations, it became a classic in mental science, universally accepted as a significant clinical document and admired for its beneficial effects upon psychology, psychopathology, and social welfare. From the point of view of controls, few documents are worse, and yet from the pragmatic point of view we are warned that scientific safeguards will not in themselves save

a poor document from the dust pile, nor prevent a good one from contributing somehow to the course of scientific progress. In spite of its lack of *objective* support Beers' story is acceptable partly because of his skill in conveying the experience he undergoes, and partly because at all points the document checks with the experience of clinicians and other readers so far as they have acquaintance with the problem the author treats. It is not the objective proofs that count in this case but the high degree of internal consistency and plausibility.

Beers has had many imitators and successors. Partly it was his pioneering that helped to break down the barriers of reticence against the narration of personal suffering; but partly the subjective tide was riding in with the twentieth century literature. Among the autobiographies of expsychotics we have those of Hillyer (94), Brown (38, Jayson (101), Kinder (110), Krauch (115); of neurotics, the stories told by Leonard (125), and Field (71); among accounts of alcoholics are the case book of Nossen (142) and the poignant story of the Inmate of Ward Eight (98). Johnson (103), a stutterer, tells his tale; so too do Hoopes (96) and Carlson (46), birth injury cases. All are living documents and offer themselves both as comfort to companions in misery and as grist for the psychologist's mill.

Mention must be made of one autobiography of handicap that antedates Beers by four years and deserves almost as much credit in drawing the attention of psychologists to the value of subjective accounts of unusual mental conditions—Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life* (109).

THE JUDGE BAKER FOUNDATION

Dr. William Healy and Dr. Augusta Bronner have performed a service to social science in their long-standing

insistence upon the inclusion of the "child's own story" in their many records of delinquent cases. One series of cases published in 1922 (104) introduced a unique method of presentation. Records about 40 pages long appeared on one side of the page with running comments on the opposite sheet. As an aid to students, and as a device to facilitate interpretation this technique deserves wider use than it has received. The child's own story is always included, with occasional excerpts from his autobiography, but for the most part a record consists of interviews during which the child's view of his home, parents, school, playmates, and personal difficulties comes to light. In insisting upon the use of the child's own story, the compilers write

> The own story affords the only means of acquiring knowledge of many factors concerning outside situations as well as factors in the mental life which may be active elements in producing that which we are studying, namely, the tendency to delinquency. There is a much richer psychology concerned in the inner mental life, memories, ideations, imageries, etc., with their emotional backgrounds than is dreamed of during an ordinary examination of a delinquent young person. And this is not material of theoretical or academic interest; it is most useful in its practical bearing upon what ought to be done in the case. (104, p. 31a)

In the work of Healy and Bronner, as in that of Thomas and Znaniecki, we have methodological self-consciousness along with the insistence upon inclusion of subjective documentary material. Again it is not strictly accurate to list these studies under "uncritical use of personal documents." They stand at the threshold of the newer and more recent critical developments.

A HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY IN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

In the three volumes of autobiographies appearing under his editorship between 1930 and 1936 Murchison (137) has provided an unexpected touchstone for the psychologist's use and evaluation of the personal document. Designed primarily

as a contribution to the history of psychological science, the 43 chapters contained in these volumes show what kinds of personal documents psychologists write about themselves for publication, and likewise, to some extent, what they themselves think of the method they are employing.

In 15 cases the authors have chosen to write an impersonal intellectual history, reflecting the times in which they worked and, to a lesser degree, their own mental development. In 19 cases considerable subjective material is included so that the intellectual history becomes genuinely personalized. But in only 9 cases is a truly intimate document presented.

Among the authors' comments on the defects and values of autobiography as a psychological method we find the following:

To the psychologist this would appear to be a particularly spontaneous and natural thing to do, seeing that his own soul, like those of his subjects in the laboratory and in the world, is the sort of object he has spent his life teasing, analyzing, estimating. (James Mark Baldwin)

I have come to the end of my reminiscences. What interest they can have for anyone, I hardly know—save for myself, to whom they have shown how difficult it is, even for a psychologist, to have a clear vision of oneself. (Edouard Claparède)

I have always protested against subjective psychology, and here I am asked for a most personal and subjective psychological analysis. It will necessarily be very poor, and the historians of the future, if by any chance they should concern themselves with me, will find this autobiography very ridiculous. (Pierre Janet)

To stop thus and contemplate one's self is not feasible simply upon command; it requires some inner motivation—be it through old age that brings with it a desire to say a conclusive farewell . . . or be it through some epoch in one's life that invites one to rest, to look before and after. (William Stern)

I have gained the conviction that scientific psychology should undertake not only the observation of living man, but also more extensively and systematically than heretofore, the analysis of literary documents. . . . In studying such documents the method of literary psychology must not rest satisfied with intuition and sympathetic insight, although these

basic means of understanding are indispensable and irreplaceable. . . . After one is in possession of materials (arranged in accordance with psychological interests) it is to be recommended, especially when the need of comparison appears, that the data be analyzed by simple statistical methods also. (Karl Groos)

Herein lies the difficulty in any autobiographical sketch which purports to deal with one's mental development. It is a story of oneself in the past, read in the light of one's present self. There is much supplementary inference—often erroneous inference—wherein 'must have been' masquerades as 'was so!' The story is pretty sure to be too neat and trim. (C. Lloyd Morgan)

An account merely of one's intellectual life can hardly avoid depicting a prig rather than a human being. (Margaret F. Washburn)

My chief anxiety about this series of autobiographies is that so few of the authors will tell me the things I should like to know about their ancestry, their childhood and their youth. (L. M. Terman)

One must know how to divide one's personality, that is the necessary preparation for anyone who is starting to write an autobiography. Then we should keep fixed two perspectives: that of perception and that of memory, that is, to keep patiently and sharply outlined in our minds the characteristic inward situations of the present and those which we believe existed in our past lives. (Sante de Sanctis)

Other contributors speak of the alluring or embarrassing nature of the undertaking; many suspect their own errors of memory; several comment on the value of collecting personal documents from representative professional groups in general, and of this attempt to construct a psychology of psychologists in particular. One mournfully asks:

How am I to respond to an invitation to write the history of my psychological life without committing more indiscretions than anybody would care to be responsible for?

From the methodological point of view, Murchison's unique undertaking demonstrates in the decade of the Thirties that (a) several outstanding living psychologists were markedly attracted to the task of writing their own autobiographies for publication; (b) that no standard technique was available to them for use (although most of the con-

tributors would know how to go at *other* scientific assignments in a uniform way); and (c) few had much of importance to offer regarding the methodological aspect of the undertaking.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CLINIC (1907-1935)

Sensing the need of a purely clinical journal which should emphasize the development of the individual child, Lightner Witmer in 1907 founded *The Psychological Clinic* (191). Although problems of mental and moral retardation were to receive primary attention it was planned that the journal should provide outlet for accounts of the development of individual normal children as well. The editorial policy of no other psychological periodical has ever invited the scientific use and exploitation of the personal document to such an extent as did the *Clinic*. In the 28 years of its existence well over 200 individual cases were printed along with many articles of general interest on the subject of mental deviation. Yet, for our present purposes, the history of this journal has a merely negative outcome. Not one single critical article on the *method* of the case study was published, and nothing beyond the most incidental and pedestrian use of *personal documents* is to be found in its files.

We call attention to the aridness of this undertaking, as judged from the methodological point of view, simply in order to introduce the suggestion that now perhaps is the time for the founding of a truly clinical journal of individual psychological cases and discussions of method; or, that failing, for the inclusion of personal documents in the editorial purview of existing psychological journals. At present, none seems to encourage or feature them.

CONCLUSION

Our survey thus far has brought to light a motley array of studies involving the use of personal documents. They have

constantly increased in number ever since historical conditions became auspicious approximately half a century ago. The studies reviewed in this chapter have as common features their directness and enthusiasm of approach and their prevailing lack of concern with technical perplexities. The reader, knowing the heavy influence of behaviorism during the present century, may be surprised to learn to what extent psychologists have gravitated toward the personal document. It is because this trend is growing more and more marked that critical attention to the improvement of method is in order.

Chapter 2

Critical and Experimental Studies

THE ADVENT AND ASPIRATION of the critical age in the use of human documents are described by Murphy, Murphy and Newcomb:

> Just as the spontaneous diary has tended to be crowded out (for scientific purposes) by the controlled diary, so the whole case method has tended to take on a flavor of 'control.' Though case studies are still plentiful (biographies and autobiographies extending all the way from a page or two up to elaborate documents of hundreds of pages), and though they are often of great clinical value, the collection of more and more material has inevitably led to *statistical treatment of comparable data* and to the attempt to define and measure each of the items of behavior which appear in the life history. (138, p. 842)

These authors speak likewise of the possibility of a systematic biographical technique becoming eventually "as exact a science as psychophysics." It is true, as the present chapter will show, that improvements in method are now constantly sought, but these improvements are not all in the direction of attaining acceptable statistical standards. Many of them have to do with augmenting the efficiency and meaningfulness of the single document. Further, it is questionable whether the emulation of psychophysics constitutes a desirable ideal for the personal document.

THE POLISH PEASANT AS A TURNING POINT

If any line can be drawn between the era of uncritical and the era of the critical use of personal documents, the publication of the research of Thomas and Znaniecki in 1920 marks

the date (181). There are, to be sure, plenty of instances of uncritical use down to the present day; but it was unquestionably the availability of *The Polish Peasant* that began to turn the attention of sociologists—and somewhat later of psychologists—to the methodological problems involved. The very extravagance of the authors' enthusiasm brought the issue into focus:

> We are safe in saying that personal life-records, as complete as possible, constitute the *perfect* type of sociological material, and that if social science has to use other materials at all it is only because of the practical difficulty of obtaining at the moment a sufficient number of such records to cover the totality of sociological problems, and of the enormous amount of work demanded for an adequate analysis of all the personal materials necessary to characterize the life of a social group. (181, pp. 1832f.)

BLUMER'S CRITIQUE OF *THE POLISH PEASANT*

At the instigation of the Social Science Research Council Blumer in 1938 prepared a valuable critique of *The Polish Peasant*. The critique, as well as the study it examines, are definitely oriented from the sociological point of view. The definition of human document as "an account of individual experience which reveals the individual's actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life" (29, p. 29) betrays this fact. From the *psychological* point of view a human document does not necessarily reveal the individual as a "participant in social life." There are nonsocial forms of thought, of imagination, reflections of temperament, of behavior in solitude, surges of religious feeling, and other intimate states of mind which represent little or no social participation. Psychiatrists and psychologists would, therefore, have standards of judgment somewhat different from Blumer's in evaluating the personal documents employed. They would not be bound to judge whether the documents were faithful representations of the social structure, mores,

and values of Polish peasant life. They would be less concerned with the question whether Władek was a representative Pole, and more concerned with the validity of Władek's account of his own individual life.

Adopting Blumer's standards of judgment, however, we must agree with his conclusions. The documents employed by Thomas and Znaniecki, taken individually, fail to measure up by any one of four criteria of evaluation. Their *representativeness* is not established; their *adequacy* for the purpose for which they are employed is not proved; their *reliability* is not checked by independent sources; and the *validity of the interpretations* drawn from any single document is by no means demonstrated.

Yet such devastating negative evidence does not lead Blumer to conclude that human documents fail as scientific aids. He hastens to state two important qualifications: (1) To set aside the documents as having no scientific value, he says, would be to "ignore the understanding, insight, and appreciation which their careful reading yields." (2) Taken collectively, he finds, the documents fare much better, for since the documents are numerous, when pieced together they tend to give consistent pictures. The sheer weight of numbers tends to confer upon the documents "representativeness, a certain adequacy and reliability that cannot be ignored." For three of the four criteria of scientific acceptability, then, Blumer finds, personal documents measure up *if they exist in sufficient numbers* to create a preponderance of evidence. This favorable conclusion fails to satisfy when we come to consider the dilemma of the social scientist who has only *one* personal document to employ, a problem to be discussed in Chapters 4 and 11 of the present report.

Regarding the fourth criterion (validity of interpretations) Blumer has much to say. He writes:

It is clear, as we have stated above, that the letters presented by Thomas and Znaniecki are not the inductive material out of which they have constructed their elaborate analysis of Polish peasant life. It is equally clear, however, that the letters are not mere illustrative material for the exemplification of their theoretical analyses. The actual relation is somewhere between. The numerous and thoughtful notes to the letters give us every reason to believe that the authors mulled over the letters a great deal and derived much from them in the way of ideas, suggestions, and generalizations which they incorporated into their theoretical statements. There is equal reason to believe that they already had a rather extensive theoretical scheme (built out of experience that had nothing to do with the letters) with which they approached the letters and which guided and frequently coerced their interpretation of the letters. Thus, there has been an interaction between theory and inductive material, but an interaction which is exceedingly ambiguous. (29, p. 37f.)

This process of interaction between theory and inductive material which Blumer finds ambiguous is the essence of the methodological problem of personal documents.

Since "the letters get their meaning and significance from the introductions and footnotes rather than vice versa," it is clear that the authors do not use these documents in an exclusively inductive manner. Furthermore Blumer finds that at times the construction placed upon documentary materials is arbitrary and strained, or more often than not, merely "plausible." The framework for the interpretation of the materials is not formed by the materials themselves, but is brought to the task by the authors. And though at times the documents have a "tough, independent character which enables them to be a test of a theoretical conception, at other times they seem, metaphorically speaking, to be helpless before the imposition of a theoretical view." No standard exists by which to demonstrate the *necessary* logic of an explanatory theory. Its validity "can be tested only by the reader's judgment and frequently, the judgment is shaped by the interpretation given by the authors." It is this basic predicament that furnished the theme for the lively conference on Blumer's critique (published in the same volume)

that took place under Council auspices in December 1938. The central question was *how do we know when we have a valid social theory?* Several possible criteria were examined by the conferees. To these we return in Chapter 12.

The outcome of the Polish research, of Blumer's critique, and of the conference is not decisive and final, but one accomplishment clearly stands out. Attention at last has been focused upon the central problems of method, and the superficial objections of positivists and behaviorists have once and for all been overcome. Thomas silences them with the following words:

> A document prepared by one compensating for a feeling of inferiority or elaborating a delusion of persecution is as far as possible from objective reality, but the subject's view of the situation, how he regards it, may be the most important element for interpretation. For his immediate behavior is closely related to his definition of the situation which may be in terms of objective reality or in terms of subjective appreciation—'as if' it were so. . . . If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.[1]

KRUEGER'S *AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DOCUMENTS AND PERSONALITY*

Shortly after the publication of *The Polish Peasant,* E. T. Krueger (117) undertook to test the usefulness and validity of autobiographical documents as data for scientific research. His conclusions stress the value of self-written documents as a basis for comparative studies of causative factors, especially for discovering the genesis of social attitudes.

Interesting is his fourfold classification of the types of autobiographies.

(1) The *confessional document* which has its origin in personal disorganization and in feelings of inferiority. Through the headlong writing of intimate confessions conflict and tension find relief. This type of writing "flows hot and eruptive from the fiery experience of the human soul. The person

[1] Quoted from Thomas' reply to Blumer. (29, p. 85)

seeks rest and redemption. . . ." Its essential motive is to achieve "social reincorporation." By attempting to make others understand our experience, to feel as we feel and to see as we see, we betray our longing for reacceptance into society. No doubt this motive is to be found in many documents, but considering the secrecy with which they are usually guarded, it seems that Krueger overstates the case when he regards this motive as "essential."

(2) A second form is the *egotistical document* which for the most part betrays the processes of rationalization. It is conventional and frequently defensive in character. In this type, Krueger writes, "we may have either pride in shameful details of life, a complete immunity to such details and a dependence upon conventional patterns, or, as is in the emancipated type, a humorous and detached, almost artless narration of the private life."

(3) *Scientific autobiographies* are the result of trained detachment, written with the deliberate purpose of describing and analyzing in objective terms what the individual has felt and thought. Though these documents may have clarity of conceptualization they are lacking in freshness and spontaneity.

(4) *Naïve documents* are written by persons more or less limited by convention. Suffering no personal disorganization they seem to lack an essentially private life, and give forth little more than mildly self-appreciative and relatively colorless accounts of their experiences.

Krueger is probably correct in rating the confessional document as highest in candor, completeness, clarity of motive, and freedom from self-idealization. Produced in a state of tension when conflicts compel some resolution if only in writing, the confession taps what Lewin has called the "inner personal" regions of a life.

Returning to Krueger's contention that self-written documents form an excellent basis for discovering the genesis of attitudes, a word of caution is in order. There is something exceedingly elusive in mental *origins*. Actually, even the best autobiographies seem to leave beginnings in the dark. For example, H. G. Wells (188) trying to trace origins of important traits in himself, finds the task baffling, and is forced to resort time after time to a nativistic explanation in terms of the "texture" of his brain. In certain mass studies the results are equally discouraging. Breslaw's subjects (37) were not able to tell much of value concerning the genesis of their radical or conservative attitudes, nor were Symonds' subjects (174) able to report convincingly on the motives that led to the selection of teaching as a career. It seems that methods supplementary to the autobiography must be used to determine the origin and development of attitudes.

STOUFFER'S STUDIES OF RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY IN THE USE OF PERSONAL DOCUMENTS

In Stouffer's research (172) four judges rated 238 topical autobiographies on a graphic rating scale in respect to the autobiographer's attitude toward prohibition. By averaging the intercorrelations of the composite ratings, expressed as standard scores, of each pair of judges with each other pair, a reliability coefficient of +.96 was obtained. Correlating the composite ratings given by readers of the case history with the earlier measured attitude toward prohibition of the subject (Smith's scale) a validity coefficient of +.81 resulted (+.86 if corrected for attenuation). The conclusion of this straightforward investigation is that judges are able to agree in their rating of self-written documents and, furthermore, to agree with an independent source of information concerning the attitudes of the writers of these documents. Although Stouffer's findings are encouraging, not all research with

personal documents should expect to achieve coefficients of this magnitude, for his investigation dealt with only one aspect of the writer's mental life. Furthermore, the similarity between the tasks set for the subject (the topical document and the Smith scale) raises a problem of spuriousness in validation. Probably Stouffer's results should be considered representative of what can be expected under *simplified* conditions of research.

Employing a set of 600 documents collected from college students, Cavan, Hauser, and Stouffer (50) studied the ability of three judges to classify the cases according to certain categories (e.g., the degree to which the child had been encouraged and urged on in his social development by his parents). The students had written their accounts following a suggested guide. In all of the categories a statistically reliable agreement was found among the judges. In fact they agreed virtually as well in the laborious task of classifying life histories as in classifying, in respect to the same categories, the responses of subjects to a simple questionnaire. The writers conclude that it is possible, though not economical, to treat life history materials quantitatively in practice. Questionnaires yield essentially the same results and are ordinarily more convenient to use. Hall had reached the same conclusion at the turn of the century.

DOLLARD'S *CRITERIA FOR THE LIFE HISTORY*

Working with a Subcommittee on Cooperation and Competition under the Social Science Research Council, John Dollard in 1935 prepared his significant critique of the life history method (62). He laid down seven criteria and with their aid evaluated six standard life histories. Only three of the cases are first-person documents, but his procedure as well as the criteria themselves are applicable to our present problem.

Although it would be impossible to name a volume in this field of study so stimulating to read and so rich in insights, we are forced, nevertheless, to criticize its a priori character. Convinced of the prodigious importance of culture in shaping personality and of the finality of Freudian psychology, Dollard contents himself with bringing these somewhat opposed points of view to bear upon the six case studies. He pays little attention to constitutional and temperamental factors in personality, or to the extensive teachings of non-Freudian genetic psychology. The framework of the study is thus acceptable only to those who share the author's intellectual biases. If the biases are accepted the evaluations of the six cases seem to follow acceptably; if not, the evaluations seem capricious.[2] The criteria themselves are few in number and do not deal with such problems as obtaining acceptable histories, achieving agreement in interpretation among independent investigators, or methods of presentation for optimum understanding.

The accompanying table summarizes Dollard's judgment of the six life histories analyzed according to his seven criteria. A plus sign signifies that he praises a study for its fulfillment of the criterion in question; a zero that the criterion is not adequately met; a minus sign that the document is judged defective in respect to the criterion. Dollard himself does not use these quantitative symbols; but they are employed here in an attempt to summarize his judgments in the briefest possible way.

[2] *Children of Bondage* (57) written in 1940 by Davis and Dollard was intended as an application of the seven rules. Here are nine life histories of Negro adolescents selected from the lower, middle, and upper classes of Negro society. The same explanatory concepts are employed: the impact of social status upon the child, and the earliest conditions of training in eliminative functions and sex. This meager formula, when applied equally to all cases, fails to differentiate one child from another. Culture (for a given class) is assumed to be uniform, Freud's mechanisms are assumed to be ubiquitous; yet the personalities of the children differ.

DOLLARD'S EVALUATION OF SIX CASES*

Criterion	Adler	Taft	Freud	Thomas and Znaniecki	Shaw	Wells
I Subject viewed as specimen in cultural series	−	−	+	++	++	++
II Organic motivation must be socially relevant	−	+	+	+	−−	+
III Role of family group in transmitting culture must be recognized	−	−	+	o	+	o
IV Elaboration of organic materials into social behavior must be shown	o	−	++	−	−	−
V Continuous related character of experience from childhood through adulthood must be stressed	++	+	++	o	+	+
VI "Social Situation" must be continuously and carefully specified	o	−	+	−	++	−
VII Life-history material must be organized and conceptualized	+	+	++	o	o	−

* Alfred Adler, *Case of Miss R.* (1); Jessie Taft, *Thirty-one Contacts with a Seven-year-old Boy* (175), a Rankian analysis; Sigmund Freud, *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy* (76); W. I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki, *Life-record of an Immigrant* (181); Clifford R. Shaw, *The Jack-Roller* (164); H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography* (188).

From this table the author's deference to Freud is evident at a glance. He rates Freud high by all the criteria—even the cultural. Another judge might question whether the case of Little Hans deserves such high praise, especially in relation to Criteria I, II, IV, and VI. But whatever the rating of the case by the criteria, there are readers who will dismiss it as inferior and even fantastic. In other words, Dollard's criteria will not bring social scientists to agree on the value of a document. The autobiography of H. G. Wells, though it comes off rather badly in Dollard's hands, will seem to many to be of incomparably greater value than the Freudian case. The point is that while Dollard formulates his own preferences he does not succeed in establishing objective standards by which to command the consent of his readers to his evaluations.

In the table it is interesting to note that the prevailing

strength of the clinical cases lies in their attention to early-life entries (Criterion V) and to conceptualization under a unified system of thought (Criterion VII). Likewise it is apparent that their weakness lies in their lack of cultural perspective (Criterion I). The sociological cases have opposite strength and weakness. Both types turn out to be feeble in respect to Criterion IV (excepting only the Freudian case which here seems to be enjoying a halo judgment). This criterion has to do with the psychology of learning, the etiology of traits and attitudes, and with continuous process of socialization. Since neither sociologists nor psychoanalysts are specialists in the mechanisms of learning the author might have done well to include a case prepared by an "academic" psychologist to see whether it would have succeeded in showing "in detail" how the organism "slowly becomes capable of social life in its particular group."

It is by no means certain that an academic psychologist would succeed in writing a convincing account of the socialization process in concrete terms applicable to a single case. We all know that every individual emerges after a process of training into the state of more or less socialized adulthood, but how the transformations occur is a baffling story. Just when and where the mechanisms of conditioning, suggestion, identification, repression, integration, differentiation, sublimation, and the like, apply appears almost impossible to determine in the total fusion of growth processes. The process seems more convincing when handled abstractly in textbooks than when handled concretely in a single case.[3]

[3] What textbook writers seldom point out is that the mechanisms of growth vary in their operation from case to case to such a degree that the only basis for genetic interpretation is an intensive study of the individual person. What may be an hereditary characteristic in one, is acquired in another, and what may be a product of identification in one, is a product of differentiation in another. In any case, Dollard has given us a criterion in IV that is extremely difficult to meet. To estimate cause-and-effect sequences in a child whom we

When Dollard asserts (in Criterion I) that "the subject must be viewed as a specimen in a cultural series," it is appropriate to ask "Why must he? Why may he not be viewed as an *individual* instead of as a link in a cultural chain?" When Dollard demands (in Criterion II) that "the organic motors of action ascribed must be socially relevant," one may ask again, "Why must they? What if the matters in question (instinct, autism, abulia, hyper-thyroidism) are purely organic and not relevant socially?" And so it may go with all the other criteria. All are the author's personal predilections, not scientific axioms.

One additional peculiarity of Dollard's application of his criteria must be mentioned. He sometimes seems to rate a document according to its success in reaching a cultural or Freudian *result,* not according to its observance of the criterion considered as a procedural instrument. Thus, H. G. Wells, whom he penalizes for failing to specify the family role in transmitting culture, does in fact consider this item at length, devoting over 100 pages to the topic. But Wells, after tracing his family life and reactions to it in detail, reaches an essentially negative conclusion and relapses into an organic explanation, in terms of the "texture" of his "brain." This conclusion displeases Dollard and he gives Wells a relatively low rating in Criterion III, apparently not because Wells fails to observe the rule but because his result is not what Dollard, on the basis of his presuppositions, expects.

To establish a criterion of any kind it is first necessary to state the purpose for which the criterion is created. Much of the arbitrariness in the author's approach might have been avoided if he had made clear his conception of the purpose of life histories. The nearest he comes to so doing is in his

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observe daily is perplexing enough, whereas to estimate them from written documents seems impossible.

definition of the life history as "a deliberate attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it."[4] This statement, however, does not place its emphasis clearly enough to justify the author's exclusive preoccupation with culture and with psychoanalysis.[5]

In summary, Dollard sets up his standards for the use of documents in accordance with his personal predilections for culturism and Freudianism. Such a private system of judgment should be replaced, if possible, with rules for the interpretation of documents based on external sanctions. The happy fact that such rules are now being sought may be credited largely to Dollard's courage in boldly asserting his own preferences, and in calling attention to the possibility of establishing standards for the preparation and evaluation of case material in social science. Single-handed he has blazed a trail into the forest, and many will follow to work there until at last the forest is cleared.

THE PROBLEM OF SELF-DECEPTION

A point made by nearly all writers is that, in order to be useful, personal documents need not be taken at their face value. Even the production of a paranoiac, not one word of which may be believed, can reveal much concerning the writer. Prejudices, self-deceptions, wholesome and unwholesome outlooks, ego-ideals, mannerisms, complexes, aspirations, errors of insight, and the reasons for persistent failure—all these and many other characteristics can glimmer or glare through a document whose accuracy in reporting and self-appraisal is not to be trusted. It is often more important to

[4] 62, p. 3

[5] Much more specific is the author's statement of purpose in a minor article in which he proves convincingly the utility of the life history in community research (63). Here he claims that the life history may serve as a valuable exploratory tool for outlining the sociology of a small town, and he proves his point with a large margin.

study the beliefs that men *betray* than those that they *parade*.

How are we to know whether or not a document is to be accepted at its face value? Why do we trust certain statements and not others? Usually the personal whims of the investigator seem to determine judgments of authenticity. If he is a Freudian he is likely to distrust statements of manifest motives; if a behaviorist, he discounts not only statements of motives, but likewise of feeling, thought, and volition. Subjective statements that remind the investigator of his own experience are likely to be credited; if they seem odd and unfamiliar, to be suspected. Each psychologist in his own way is alert to symptoms of self-deception and rationalization.

Objective standards by which to detect self-deception may in time be worked out. Tentative steps taken in this direction by Frenkel-Brunswik (75) suggest, for example, that the presence of superlative and absolute statements, as well as excessive repetition, may indicate that that autobiographer is fooling himself. A student in Frenkel-Brunswik's experiments who was rated by his associates as intractable and "madly over-ambitious" wrote, "I *always* do what I am ordered to do." Universal terms such as "always," "only," "at all costs," as well as repetition of assertions, have negative correlations (—.50 to —.60) with ratings by associates for the qualities in question. Conversely, tentative statements, such as "I am not sure whether or not I succeed in carrying out this ideal of mine," are more often associated with actual behavior. From such beginnings it is not impossible to extend the list of symptoms of self-deception in autobiographical writing, and to develop aids in training readers and analysts to become suspicious in the right places.

Just what effect anonymity has upon ego-involved documents is a question asked by Maller (130). His experiments with children indicate a curiously paradoxical situation.

When names are not signed the child is more self-disparaging but at the same time more ego-aggrandizing and self-inflating. Ego-defenses are down in anonymous writing, so too the conventional requirements of modesty. Probably both tendencies indicate, as Maller concludes, that the child's reaction where his name is not requested is more genuine and more representative of his general point of view. To what extent these findings hold for adult personal documents is a matter not yet determined; but the value of anonymity in documents as a means of reducing deliberate deception (and perhaps also self-deception) is probably high.

CARTWRIGHT AND FRENCH: *THE RELIABILITY OF LIFE-HISTORY STUDIES*

Cartwright and French (47) after perusing several years' entries in a young man's diary and holding independently a few hours' interview with him, undertook to study their interobserver reliability in respect to their predictions of this subject's responses to certain tests and questionnaires, as well as their agreement in the matter of conceptualization. Two findings are especially important.

(1) The validity of the predictions of the two investigators exceeded their reliability. How is such a result possible? Simply because each understood correctly different *aspects* of the personality. One observer, for example, might predict correctly in the areas of political behavior, sports, religion; the other, in the areas of artistic, scientific, and social behavior. This situation contains a warning to critics who demand first and foremost that observer reliability be demonstrated in the use of case documents. Though it would indeed be comforting if all investigators studying the same personal document came to the same conclusion, the fact that they do not does not necessarily invalidate their individual predictions or their interpretations.

(2) A second significant finding is that these two independent investigators agreed more closely concerning the subject's traits, attitudes, and probable course of development in the future than they did concerning the nature of his basic motives. In other words, it was easier for them to agree at the concrete level of behavior than at the conceptual level. Anyone who observes Lewinians, McDougallians, Freudians, Murrayites, Jungians, W. I. Thomists, and other partisans clash in their "explanations" of personality will recognize the point at issue. Psychologists will agree on *what* is happening in a life more readily than upon *why* it is happening.

TECHNIQUE OF THE CASE CONFERENCE

Another recent innovation in method takes account of the fact demonstrated by Reckless and Selling (154) as well as by Cartwright and French (47) that different analysts carry valid but distinctive aspects of a case in mind. Pooling their different points of view is advantageous. The diagnostic case conference is a method familiar in medicine and in social work, but its first systematic use in the psychological laboratory seems to be by Murray and his collaborators (139) whose many experimenters dealt with many aspects of many subjects' personalities. A diagnostic council of five psychologists gave final ratings and interpretations. For certain experimental purposes these members worked independently and later compared their judgments, but for other purposes the insights and judgments were pooled in joint discussion. Although in this research personal documents formed only a part of the total material employed, the method itself can obviously be used wherever there are multiple investigators available for the interpretation of autobiographies, diaries, or thematic productions. The point is that while strict independence among judges may be desirable for studies in

reliability, the pooling of judgments may be a means of enhancing the validity of interpretation. Experimental studies (56) have shown that conferences often produce this result.

POLANSKY'S *HOW SHALL A LIFE-HISTORY BE WRITTEN?*

As another example of the modern experimental approach we cite Polansky's study (147). Although this author deals entirely with third-person studies, his findings may be applicable to first-person documents as well. In any case, his method should be widely imitated. Selecting three lives Polansky constructed six studies of each, one by the *structural* approach (emphasizing contemporary traits, attitudes, and ambitions); one by the *cultural* mode (emphasizing community, family standards, and the like); one by the *genetic* mode (stressing longitudinal pattern and early events); one in terms of the *major maladjustment* (reflecting the psychiatric point of view); a fifth in terms of typical *episodes* (anecdotes of behavior); and a last in terms of *individual differences* in test scores (a typical psychometric account). Judges then read these documents in a controlled manner and made predictions therefrom. The order of success among the modes in their predictive power was *structural, cultural, genetic, episodic, individual difference,* and *major maladjustment.* In terms of subjective impressions the most interesting mode was the *structural,* the least interesting, the *individual difference* approach. "Of the three factors involved in correct predictions, it appears that the efficiency of the mode is most important, next is the predictability of the subject, and least is the capacity of the judge."[6]

Such a study has not only the practical merit of instructing us how to write case studies to achieve greatest success in predictive power and in rousing sympathetic understanding in the reader, but is especially significant in terms of psycho-

[6] 147, p. 207

logical theory. If Polansky's work is adequately verified it will tend to validate certain theories of personality (for example, those presented in the structural mode) and to discredit others (those related exclusively to the statistical-psychometric point of view and regarding personality as a matter of mere deviations from standard norms in respect to a certain number of common variables).

It is not unlikely that a continuation of this research will show that one life is most successfully represented by one mode and another by a different mode. The theoretical implication of such a finding would be important: it would signify that one life may best be conceptualized according to one theory of personality, another by a different theory. Extending this supposition to the subjective document, it may turn out that one mode of accentuation (style of writing) is appropriate to one life but inappropriate to another. It seems improbable that an infinite variety of mortals—with lives structured according to contrasting themas, with greater or less conformity to cultural norms, with or without a neurotic vortex, infantile or adult in type—can or should be expected to represent themselves equally well through any one prescribed form of life-writing.

BALDWIN'S STATISTICS OF THE SINGLE CASE

Although the study has not yet been published in full, attention should be called to an unusual attempt to quantify the structure of the personality of *one individual* life on the basis of a collection of personal documents. In making this attempt A. L. Baldwin (16) carried out with modifications a plan originally proposed by F. H. Allport (3). The materials consisted of a revealing collection of letters from a widow written during the last eleven years of her life, setting forth her abnormal attachment to her son, the story of his death

and her loneliness and reflecting her gradual deterioration of strength and hope. The method, employing an adaptation of the chi-square technique, determined the frequency with which any two ideas were related in the writer's mind. A portrait resulted of a dramatic personality, aesthetically sensitive, scrupulous in financial matters, possessive of her son's affection, suspicious and full of hatred toward women.

The method is of considerable importance representing, as it does, a contribution to the exact analysis of the structure of the unique single personality on the basis of personal documents. It sets forth a new conception of a "population" for statistics: a population of events and traits within the boundaries of one person. If the initial promise of this method is fulfilled it will supply an important bridge between the statistical and clinical points of view.

CONCLUSION

This chapter, like the preceding, has brought forth a motley array of studies, but in every case interest is centered in the basic problems of method. Some investigators have concerned themselves with observer reliability (agreement among different judges analyzing the same documents); some with methods for establishing the validity of interpretations or discovering the predictive power of documents; some with problems of classification, with the detection of self-deception, with the effects of anonymity, with the application of statistics to the single case, or with the values of the conference method. All are bent upon extracting greater gain from personal documents and upon enhancing their scientific status.

Chapter 3

For What Purposes Do Psychologists Employ Personal Documents?

THERE ARE MANY reasons why psychologists have recourse to written documents. A brief statement of some of them together with the citation of illustrative studies will show how wide is the variety of objectives served and scientific gains sought. The diversity is indeed striking.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

If we want to know how people feel: what they experience and what they remember, what their emotions and motives are like, and the reasons for acting as they do—why not ask them? This is the simple logic of the introspectionist's position that commends itself to many in spite of the scorching displeasure of behaviorists and objectivists. Personal documents are for the most part introspective protocols, adapted especially to the study of the complexities of phenomenal consciousness. Their use seems natural enough to psychologists who happen to be interested in complex phenomenal states. W. Stern argues the case as follows:

> Every person knows for himself alone *how* any feeling, e.g., grief, anxiety, is *immediately* experienced. He likewise knows how thoughts arise and become linked with one another, or how mental items leading to some act of will (impulses, deliberations, doubts, conflicts, of motives, decisions, etc.) appear as facts of mind. (171, p. 48)

In a sense every introspective report ever rendered and

recorded is a personal document. In extensity, of course, they vary from crisp laboratory protocols ("I see the brightness of this light as equal to the brightness of that light") to the prolonged intricate soul-searching of a Rousseau, Strindberg, Beers, or Leonard.

Galton's accounts of the imagery of his correspondents are elementary phenomenological documents (83), and, as pointed out in Chapter 1, some of the classics in psychology are essentially introspective records elaborately generalized by their authors. It might also be said that the strengths and weaknesses of phenomenology (and the introspective method) are the strengths and weaknesses of personal documents. The exception to this statement lies in the fact that personal documents often have diagnostic value even if they are not taken at their face value, whereas phenomenological reports in the traditional sense have to be taken at their face value in order to be of scientific use.

THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

One of the most subjective of all areas of experience is the religious life. It is safe to say that it has never been studied with even partial adequacy by any means other than the personal document. Following Starbuck (169) and James (100), the analysis of collected protocols, diaries, autobiographies from the point of view of religious experience, has been undertaken by a large number of investigators, among whom Höffding (95), Bohne (30), Kupky (120), and Clark (52) are especially worthy of mention. It is apparently impossible to take even the first steps in the psychology of religion without a sympathetic regard for subjective documentary records.

STUDY OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

It is not an accident that most studies of unemployment include personal documents or quoted interviews. Here is

another region of social and personal dislocation where the subjective factor is of outstanding importance. The chances of rehabilitation rest in large part upon the answer to the phenomenological question "How do those who have lost their jobs experience their situations?" Subjective attitudes, outlook, morale, are decisive.

To cite but two examples: Zawadski and Lazarsfeld (197) analyzed 57 representative autobiographies secured in the course of a prize competition among unemployed in Poland. The affective reactions of the writers were classified according to the predominance of feelings of injury and resentment, of futility, of anxiety. Periods of apathy, moods of hopefulness, and eventual dumb acquiescence were discovered to mark the course of prolonged unemployment. In an essentially confirmatory study Lazarsfeld-Jahoda and Zeisl (124) found that the unemployed of Marienthal could be grouped into four types: the unbroken, the resigned, the distressed, the apathetic.

MENTAL LIFE OF ADOLESCENTS

Up to now the subjective writings of adolescents have been more zealously sought and more searchingly studied than the productions of adults, especially in Germany and Russia. It is argued that the experiences peculiar to adolescence are inaccessible to adults whose later encounters with love and life have the effect of recasting totally the nascent and turbulent gropings of adolescents in their struggle to come to terms with physical reality and social responsibility. The argument that the personal document is for this reason the *best* means of studying adolescence is set forth by G. Stanley Hall (86), Stern (170) and Iovetz-Tereschenko (99).

Not only in principle are personal documents valuable for the study of the psychology of youth, but also there is a practical advantage in that personal documents are relatively more plentiful for this period of life than for any other period.

DIDACTIC USES

A Russian investigator Popović (149), on the basis of an experiment, claims that practice in writing self-reports increases the keenness of observation and insight of adolescents, as well as powers of self-control. It is by no means uncommon to find the writing of an autobiography assigned to students in high schools and colleges, nor is it rare to find enthusiastic reports of personal gains from students who complete the assignment. Within the past few years the practice has definitely increased in connection with instruction in mental hygiene, social psychology, and the psychology of personality. Wallin's published collection of cases illustrates the trend (186).

PRACTICAL USE OF EXPERIENCE RECORDS

Social progress may come about through the employment of vivid stories of personal experience (just as it may come about through socially-oriented novels of the order of *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Oliver Twist,* or *The Grapes of Wrath*). The autobiography of Beers (21) and its social consequences has already been mentioned as a classic example. Another example may be found in the *Erlebnis* records of which German psychologists are fond.

Collecting material *zur Psychographie des Kriegers* the Institut für angewandte Psychologie in Berlin circulated a questionnaire during the first world war, inquiring into the soldiers' experiences in respect to danger, sexual adjustments, social relations, combat conditions, deprivations, and the like. The replies were assembled and interpreted by Plaut (145). Important is the fact that this same material, and other experience records like it, have been a factor in shaping the psychological strategy and army policies of the Nazi regime (68). No American psychologist has collected self-written

documents from American soldiers for the purpose of framing military policies and enhancing military morale. It might be well if this had been done.

AUTOANALYSIS

One class of personal documents is bent deliberately upon securing for the author some form of cure. They are outpourings of the cathartic variety with the aim of curing a neurotic disposition, or of seeking general improvement in mental poise through enhancement of insight. Perhaps the best document of this order, written at white heat during nine weeks (but following many years of preparation) is W. E. Leonard's *Locomotive-God* (125). Strikingly candid, and in many respects unsparing of self and associates, the story was written in the hope that the phobic condition it brilliantly describes might be alleviated—a hope which was not realized. This document attracted considerable attention from psychologists and psychoanalysts, the latter pointing to it as proof that autoanalysis is futile because it fails to allow for transference, cannot go deeply enough into the unconscious, and provokes resistance and all manner of self-deception. Some psychologists, on the other hand, have praised the document as remarkable for its insight and for its excellence in handling basic problems in the genesis and development of personality. Taylor and Culler (177) compiled the views of many psychologists concerning its value, and G. W. Allport (11) described its usefulness as an instrument of teaching, and with its aid evolved a theory of the understanding of personality with which to account for the coherent and unforgettable impression such a document leaves upon the mind of the reader.

Another example of this class is Nicolaysen's study based upon 1400 pages of spontaneous writing by a 28-year-old

man (140). Nicolaysen claims to have found "a new systematic method whereby the individual may be aided in resolving his own mental conflicts, clarifying and recognizing his motives, and thereby redirecting his behavior into more self-adjusted patterns." This claim would be disputed by psychoanalysts who maintain that there are few who can fully analyze themselves. Nevertheless, since there are all gradations in the achieving of insight, it is likely that *some* positive therapy would result even if a document were written by a patient for no eyes other than his own. It is no doubt true, as Nicolaysen says, that the essential conditions for autoanalytic writing are that the subject must experience dissatisfaction with his present behavior and a desire for self-improvement and for self-understanding; and that he be willing to face reality and have confidence in his ability to carry the project through to successful completion.

Milici (133) reports a case wherein a schizophrenic was allegedly cured by writing down his personal experiences and thoughts: the technique is labeled by Milici "graphocatharsis." In this connection one may expect the currently popular "semantic therapy" to lead to a constantly increasing use of self-reporting. Shaw (164) finds that the act of writing an autobiography has cathartic and therapeutic value in the case of juvenile delinquents. Whether complete cure is ever achieved simply in the act of writing down one's troubles and one's history may be doubted, but the almost universal testimony is that some personal benefit results. Most of the great autobiographic confessors remark on the cathartic value of their autobiographies.

HISTORICAL DIAGNOSES

One of the commonest uses of personal documents is their analysis for the purpose of shedding light upon the personali-

ties of writers, artists, and other gifted people. In this connection, Bragman is known for his studies of Rossetti (34), Symonds (36), Dell (35); Squires for his studies of Dostoevsky (166), Jean Paul (167) and many others. Tolstoy has had many posthumous diagnoses, among them those by Velikovsky (185), and Karpman (106). Examples are numerous: Molière, Sand, Goethe, Dürer, Coleridge, Lagerlöf, Nietzsche, Elizabeth Browning, Swedenborg, Strindberg, Rousseau, Thomas Aquinas, Poe, Shakespeare—almost no one escapes.

In part these diagnoses are strictly "clinical" in the sense that the individual himself is the whole focus of interest; in part they are "illustrative" in the sense that the analyst is striving to score a general point or to illustrate a certain mental mechanism. Often the reader wonders at the writer's recklessness in rendering a diagnosis on relatively scant evidence, and he may feel that there is a slightly unpleasant theatrical air about such preoccupation with colorful personages when so little work has been done with run-of-the-mill personalities.

SUPPLEMENT TO PSYCHIATRIC EXAMINATION

Discovering that autobiographies written by juvenile delinquents are of special value in psychiatric examination and treatment, Selling (163) proposes their wider use by alienists and therapeutists. Material submitted to the doctor in writing may be different from that given in conversation, and thus opens many new leads for the psychiatrists. The autobiography, says Selling, should be obtained relatively early in the period of treatment, and can often be obtained to best advantage by the psychologist who sees the patient prior to the psychiatric examination proper. Besides aiding the psychiatrist in dealing with the case, Schroeder (162) makes clear that this procedure has also a therapeutic value in itself,

initiating and helping to guide the course of treatment. It is especially valuable, Schroeder thinks, in aiding the neurotic to obtain his initial insight.

Rosanoff (157) gives personal documents an accredited place among psychiatric methods. From the standpoint of symptomatology he regards four kinds of writing as significant: (a) *spontaneous writings* which are always useful for the psychiatrist who must have "a free expression of the patient's viewpoint, even if the statements made by him are incorrect"; (b) writings from *copy;* (c) writings from *dictation;* and (d) specimens of *penmanship* which may reflect motor disorders. Henderson and Gillespie (92) plead for the use of documents as a means of "understanding the patient as a human being," in recognition of the basic principle that "mental illness is an individual affair" whose "symptoms have little meaning apart from the setting in which they occur."

THE SUBJECT'S VERIFICATION AND VALIDATION

A rare but potentially important use of first-person documents is the "rebuttal" that may be offered by a subject to another's analysis of himself. Two examples are Freud's critique of Wittels' biography published as an introduction to the biography itself (192), and the philosopher's answer to his expositors and critics in the series known as the *Library of Living Philosophy,* illustrated in the volume devoted to John Dewey (161). In such cases as these the "victim" himself has the opportunity to correct, or at least protest, the statements of fact and interpretations made by his biographers. Whether or not the rebuttal is sound cannot always be determined, but in any event, the subjective check on statements made by analysts and interpreters is a device that makes for good sportsmanship. If the subject confirms what his biographer says, the reader has double assurance; if not,

the reader is free to weigh the evidence or to choose between two authorities.

MENTAL EFFECTS OF SPECIAL PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

At the Dartmouth Eye Institute, Bender and his associates have made an intensive survey of visual factors in relation to college adjustment. A special report on *Motivation and Visual Factors in College Students* (22) gives, besides statistical data, a set of 20 detailed psycho-portraits based upon an extensive battery of tests, interviews, and an autobiography. The conclusions of this study are important. Visual factors, even extreme deviations, it is found, do not in and of themselves cause maladjustment. They enter into the motivational stream of life, furnishing incentive to compensation, alibis for failure, or grounds for humiliation or pride, depending entirely upon the traits and needs of the individual. The use of the autobiography in this connection helps to keep the influence of physical factors in perspective.

We often hear extravagant claims for the importance of posture, speech, diet, hearing, teeth, tonsils, allergy, or somatotype in the shaping of personality. The personal document can have the merit of keeping the specialist from riding his hobby too hard, and of showing how physical factors are in the last analysis *embedded* in the total life of the subject.

LIGHT ON CREATIVE PROCESSES AND THE NATURE OF GENIUS

Personal documents have been employed as a method of studying creativity. Sometimes, as by Plaut (146), questionnaires are used to elicit the desired information from scientists or artists; sometimes, as by Downey (64), casual statements are collected from varied sources. Occasionally some artist tells so clearly why and how a creative work came into being that psychological comment seems superfluous, an example being Willa Cather's account of her conception and

inspired writing of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (48).

Although no genius can tell *why* he is a genius, his own account of the operations of his mental and emotional processes may provide an excellent safeguard against oversimplified theories of the nature of genius. Faris (69) has pointed out how inadequate the biologically-biased approach, as represented by Terman (179), may be, unless it is supplemented by an account of emotional and motivational factors, about which the genius himself can make the best report.

THE PSYCHOLOGIZING OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

The personal document forms one of the surest bonds between psychology and other social sciences. Whenever the anthropologist or historian begins to feel the need for psychological assistance he seems naturally to think in terms of concrete cases. And, unfortunately perhaps, he tends to favor the more spectacular brands of psychological explanation. Psychoanalysis is the branch of psychology most familiar to social scientists and most often employed in connection with their case studies.

In history the result usually has been a characterization of the past in terms of the collective sublimation of the neuroses and psychoses of great personalities. Clark (53) and Barnes (19) represent those who advocate the study of history through the analysis of prominent leaders and their unconscious motivation. Fearing (70) has shown how partial psychological historians have been to the Freudian concepts of instinct, the unconscious, infantile sexuality, rationalization, and the like; while Gruhle (84) has warned historians against too glib a psychologizing of documents.

Most political scientists seem now convinced that intimate studies of motives and character can shed light upon such diverse political problems as administrative talent, reform, the boss system, voting behavior, factors in public opinion,

the leader-follower relation, and parliamentary procedure. Catlin (49) warns against the hasty and inexpert psychologizing of political science; but the use of case documents is increasing constantly.

In anthropology, Radin (153), Dyk (65), and others have edited cultural autobiographies. In this field, as in all the social sciences, interpretations are likely to be drawn from psychoanalysis—whether because it is the most effortless type of psychology to lean upon, or whether it really fits the data is a question still in doubt.

In the field of sociology, the overlap with psychology has gone still further. In their use of personal documents these two disciplines have developed hand in hand. Although occasionally a sociologist places exclusive faith in the explanatory power of Freudian concepts, for the most part an eclectic and many-sided application of psychology is found in sociological analyses.

We conclude that the social sciences join forces with psychology at the level of the concrete case. It is worthy of note that the interpenetration of the social sciences seldom takes place on the abstract or "ideological" level; these sciences seem most naturally to gravitate toward one another when *specific* human problems are under discussion.

THE PSYCHOLOGIZING OF LITERATURE

Literature and psychology, just as the social sciences and psychology, meet most naturally in the single case. We have already pointed out that frequently psychiatrists have turned into literary critics. Conversely we may point out that biographers and literary critics become psychologists when they probe, as they increasingly do, the realm of motivation. Nicolson (141), an authority on English biography, makes the prediction that the mounting scientific interest in biography will eventually replace literary and artistic interest:

The scientific interest, as it develops, will become insatiable; no synthetic power, no genius for representation, will be able to keep the pace. I foresee, therefore, a divergence between the two interests. Scientific biography will become specialized and technical. There will be biographies in which psychological development will be traced in all its intricacy and in a manner comprehensible only to the experts . . . there will be sociological biographies, economic biographies, aesthetic biographies, philosophical biographies. These will doubtless be interesting and instructive, but the emphasis which will be thrown on the analytical and scientific aspect will inevitably lessen the literary effort applied to their composition. (141, p. 155)

ILLUSTRATION

Perhaps the commonest use of documents is to provide illustrative material for authors who wish to exemplify some generalization already in mind. Countless excerpts find their way into psychological and psychiatric textbooks. Psychoanalysts particularly seem to find documents a satisfying way of expounding principles. When protocols have nothing more than illustrative value, they possess no distinctive scientific merit. They become important not when they are used for mere illustration but when used as tools of discovery.

INDUCTION

It is theoretically possible for an investigator to say that he wishes to explore such and such a problem and to start with nothing but a collection of documents, watching for what will turn up. Such a complete tabula rasa, however, is hardly to be found, since all investigators know something about their subject before they commence and unavoidably have frames of reference into which they redact their findings. Yet there are approaches to the inductive ideal wherein the generalization follows closely the dictates of the particular. Something like it has developed in Bühler's *Lebenspsychologie,* particularly in *Der menschliches Lebenslauf als psychologisches Problem* wherein she analyzed over 200 life his-

tories (41). From this study emerged what to her was a necessary and unforeseen generalization, the concept of *Bestimmung*. Every life, however simple, showed the presence of self-imposed goals by which the individual invariably measured his success and failure. To be sure, the general philosophy of destiny and of wholeness was in the author's mind (she could scarcely escape it in her culture), but in the main the discovery of precisely the concept she needed may be said to have come from the evidence she found recurring in virtually every document.

Another instance where authors were led to a new set of insights and inductive generalizations was the work of Allport, Bruner, and Jandorf (12). In this study the autobiographies of 90 refugees were analyzed. At first there were many hypotheses in mind (enough to fill 20 pages of analytical schedule), but *none* of these hypotheses find themselves in the final set of conclusions. Most of them were discarded, the remainder altered in the light of the reading. It should be reported, however, apropos of sampling, that the final conclusions were glimpsed before all 90 were read. A dozen documents were sufficient to yield the hypotheses which later cases merely confirmed.

Because every investigator has his own frame of reference to start with, simon-pure induction is perhaps an impossibility, and yet it probably plays a role, sometimes more and sometimes less, in nearly every investigator's contact with personal documents.

OCCUPATIONAL AND OTHER TYPES

One of the inductive uses of personal documents is in the derivation of types. Indeed, clustering cases according to similarities perceived by the investigator is the simplest of all treatments of documentary materials. From autobiographi-

cal accounts Henry (93) infers the existence of three types of sex variants. Types of unemployed (197), of creative thinkers (146), of religious people (100) are inductively established. It is conceivable that one could, on the basis of composite documents—from which all idiosyncrasies are removed—construct the "ideal" type of representative of an occupation, of a college, or even a nation. The possibilities are virtually limitless. But what constitutes a *valid* type is a problem psychology has not yet been able to solve.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The possibility of using exchanges of letters between two persons as a means of studying the dyadic relations of friendship, of marriage, of the parent-child bond seems almost overlooked by social psychologists. To be sure, there are published series of letters between two correspondents, for example, between Abelard and Heloise, Nietzsche and Wagner; but such material seems to have interested few, if any, psychologists. Dealing with a larger circle of five girl friends, Bernfeld (24), on the basis of letters, diaries, and interviews, depicts relationships within this *Freundinnenkreis*. The extension of this technique in connection with the theories and practices of sociometry would seem to hold promise.

FIRST STEP IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF TESTS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

The insights derived from autobiographical statements often provide the initial basis for items included in standardized tests and questionnaires. Some investigators who have strong preference for objective methods and scales regard this spade work as the only valid use of personal documents. We may say then that even the enemies of the personal document ascribe to it the merit of serving as a propaedeutic to the construction of subsequent, presumably more reliable and economical, techniques of research.

REINFORCEMENT AND SUPPLEMENTATION

Often the personal document merely falls into place as one of several methods in a battery. It serves no other purpose than adding credibility to the total picture developed through interviews, tests, ratings, institutional reports, or other methods. It provides a part of the undifferentiated matrix from which the investigator draws his conclusions. This is the use which Thomas and Znaniecki made of the self-reporting of the Polish subjects.

It is illustrated likewise in Bondy's study of proletarian youth in Germany after the first world war (33). These authors leaven their comprehensive investigation with vital first-person reports; but these reports merely dovetail into a synthesis of methods, and do not by themselves serve an independent scientific purpose.

METHODOLOGICAL OBJECTIVES

Many of the authors cited in Chapter 2 have employed documents simply in order to find out how they may be used to the best advantage; for example, Stouffer (172), Cartwright and French (47), Dollard (62). To this list we might add studies concerned with the nature of *understanding:* Höffding's treatise on *experience vs. interpretation* (95) based upon an analysis of religious documents; G. W. Allport's (11) derivation of an empirical-intuitive theory of understanding from the reactions of students in reading Leonard's *Locomotive-God;* Komarovsky's study (113) of the unemployed which helped in establishing the process of "discerning" as a valid operation in the determination of cause and effect. These are some of the theoretical uses to which psychologists have put the personal document. Investigations in this class are less interested in the behavior of the individual, or in general laws of conduct, than in the *process* by which the significance of behavior becomes known and evaluated.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined a score of separate purposes for which personal documents are employed in psychological science. The list covers a wide range of theoretical, practical, historical, and methodological interests. Who can doubt that any technique that serves so many ends is worthy of sustained study and continued improvement?

Chapter 4

Nomothetic and Idiographic Uses

EPISTEMOLOGISTS seem agreed that the human mind is capable of two modes of interest and attention, either or both of which it may employ in relation to the complex universe of surrounding events. The mind may classify its experience and contemplate the general principles that emerge, or it may be concerned with the individual happening or single event confronting it. In a well-known passage William James puts the matter thus:

> The first thing the intellect does with an object is to class it along with something else. But any object that is infinitely important to us and awakens our devotion feels to us also as if it must be *sui generis* and unique. Probably a crab would be filled with a sense of personal outrage if it could hear us class it without ado or apology as a crustacean, and thus dispose of it. 'I am no such thing,' it would say; *'I am myself, myself alone.'* (100, p. 10)

Philosophers have labeled the opposition with widely diverse terminology. Leibnitz speaks of the *vérités éternelles* as opposed to the *vérités de fait;* Bergson of *analysis* (the scientific attitude) and *intuition* (the immediate common sense attitude); Wundt and other German methodologists of *Gesetzwissenschaft* in contradistinction to *Geschichtswissenschaft*. Spranger contrasts *analysis* and *understanding* (and in another connection the *theoretical* and the *aesthetic* evaluative attitude). Windelband (190) christened the opposition in the terms we here adopt: he spoke of *nomothetic* and *idiographic* forms of knowledge. Whatever terminology is em-

ployed, all writers agree that natural science favors the former and historical science, the latter mode of thought. Some writers—A. G. Bills (25) for example—argue that psychology is a wholly nomothetic discipline; others—G. W. Allport (10) for instance—that it can and should be idiographic as well.

Now, this particular issue turns out to be central in our task of evaluating the position of personal documents in psychological science. As raw data they have the peculiar capacity to serve the interest of either nomothetic or idiographic knowledge. If the derivation of general laws, statistically reliable, were the sole aim, our attention would be directed only to *collections* of documents, sufficiently numerous to form an acceptable sample to be analyzed by statistical means in respect to their common features.[1] On the other hand if only the idiographic view were held, there would be no interest in the comparative use of documents nor in their possible service for generalization. All that would count would be vivid and unique depictions, clinically valid, and useful for the understanding and control of the single case. Either the nomothetic or the idiographic framework of evaluation taken alone is too narrow, for the personal document is capable of supplying what the mind craves in both its nomothetic and idiographic moments.

It is not necessary to point out that the prevailing bias in psychological and in social science is *nomothetic.* In fact, it is exceedingly difficult—especially in America—to make the idiographic phase of knowledge seem enticing—or, indeed, even plausible—to many scientific workers. But in order to do justice to the potential value of personal documents the at-

[1] Certain reports presented to the Social Science Research Council on the use of personal documents seem to concern themselves exclusively with the nomothetic interest, and for this reason stop the process of analysis and evaluation short of the point to which it might profitably be carried.

tempt must be made. Otherwise, any evaluation will find its stopping place on the position already reached by Lundberg (128). This writer, thinking to befriend the case document, makes of it a helpless tail to the statistical kite. He writes:

> It is the thesis of this paper that the assumed opposition or incompatibility between these two methods is illusory for three principal reasons: (1) The case method is not in itself a scientific method at all, but merely the first step in scientific method; (2) individual cases become of scientific significance only when classified and summarized in such form as to reveal uniformities, types, and patterns of behavior; (3) the statistical method is the best, if not the only, scientific method of classifying and summarizing large numbers of cases. The two methods are not, therefore, under any circumstances opposed to each other, nor is the one a substitute for the other. (128, p. 61)

Lundberg gives his point emphasis by adding that case studies

> become of significance scientifically only when they are classified or summarized in some way so that the uniformities in large numbers begin to stand out and group themselves into general patterns or types. (*loc. cit.*)

Continuing this thought in relation to the psychology of the higher mental processes, Lundberg defines intuition, insight, understanding, as crude and "more or less subconscious statistical generalizations." This assumption helps him to his conclusion,

> Thus the only possible question as to the relative value of the case method and the statistical method resolves itself into a question as to whether the classification of, and generalizations from, the data should be carried out by the random, qualitative and subjective method of common observation or through systematic, quantitative and objective procedure of statistical method. (*loc. cit.*)

Individual cases, he argues, "are, for all larger scientific purposes, quite useless, unless they can be combined and generalized into types and patterns of behavior." (128, p. 63)

Thus assuming the exclusively nomothetic purpose of case documents and the subservience of insight to statistical in-

ference, Lundberg by implication eliminates documents in favor of mass observation, for surely a case report is a clumsy source with which to work compared to tests, questionnaire, and experimentation—a conclusion already reached by Cavan, Hauser, and Stouffer (50), and by Hall (86).

In order to evaluate fairly the grounds for the scientific use of personal documents a broader basis must be available than that assumed by the nomothetist. At least a modicum of the idiographic point of view must be admitted, otherwise there is little enough justification for the collection of clumsy life stories en masse, and none at all for the single document considered by itself.

THE CASE FOR IDIOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

Acquaintance with particulars is the beginning of all knowledge—scientific or otherwise. In psychology the font and origin of our curiosity in, and knowledge of, human nature lies in our acquaintance with concrete individuals. To know them in their natural complexity is an essential first step. Starting too soon with analysis and classification, we run the risk of tearing mental life into fragments and beginning with false cleavages that misrepresent the salient organizations and natural integrations in personal life. In order to avoid such hasty preoccupation with unnatural segments and false abstractions, psychology needs to concern itself with life as it is lived, with significant total-processes of the sort revealed in consecutive and complete life documents. *Training in concrete psychology should precede training in abstract psychology, and even the expert needs repeatedly to return to the concrete life in order to prevent himself from straying into esoteric and chimerical bypaths.* To believe that generalized knowledge of human nature can outstrip knowledge of particular expressions of human

nature is a grave blunder made not infrequently by both psychologists and sociologists. For this reason, therefore, absorption in personal documents, long puzzling over the interrelated phenomena there displayed, is a reasonable price for the psychologist to pay for his professional training. Here, then, is the *first* idiographic value of case documents not admitted by strictly nomothetic standards of evaluation.

To many students of psychology it has become apparent that nomothetic abstractions have led to oversimplified versions of human motivation. Few are satisfied with schemes of four wishes, nine factors, eighteen instincts, or twenty-one needs. As seen in case documents, personal causation is a far more intricate matter. *What for the nomothetist is hard to contemplate is the very real possibility that no two lives are alike in their motivational processes* (6). To assume that causation is identical from case to case is to overlook the point that Lewin has emphasized (126), namely that *lawful determinism* need not be based upon frequency of occurrence in multitudes of cases, but may apply to one-time happenings (to the single life).[2] If each personality harbors laws peculiar to itself; if the course of causation is personal instead of universal, then only the intensive idiographic study of a case will discover such laws.

To take an example: in his autobiography, H. G. Wells (188) traces the subtle and gradual growth of his dominating idea of the necessity of a World State. The contributing factors are numerous, their weights are indeterminable, they occur in no other life; and yet here is the major value-complex of a gifted mind. It is a psychological fact and it has social consequences. How shall nomothetic psychology

[2] Although Lewin has argued more ably perhaps than anyone else the case for lawfulness that is not dependent upon frequency, and has defended the place of the one-time happening in the province of legitimate scientific interest, it is a curious fact that his own researches do not rest upon this basis but clearly invoke the quantitative test of frequency of occurrence.

represent the case? Only by rough approximations can it do so. An idiographic interpretation of the causes peculiar to Wells' own developmental history and mental structure will serve the purpose better.

If nomothetic procedures were sufficient we should expect that the psychometric profile or standardized schema of inquiry would replace the cumbersome case document. Psychometrics is the nomothetic discipline that determines the degree to which individuals deviate from an average in respect to variables chosen by the scientist. Experience, however, has taught us that psychometrics is an inadequate instrument in clinical psychology. With all its weaknesses the case study remains the preferred tool of all clinicians, psychiatrists, personnel officers, and consulting psychologists. They find that the single case cannot be reduced to a colligation of scores. Here, then, we encounter a pragmatic reason why idiographic procedures must be admitted to psychological science: practitioners demand them.

A theoretical consideration underlies this practical demand. The application of knowledge is always to the single case. We apply the science of engineering only in building particular conduits or bridges. In the human realm we have to particularize our nomothetic knowledge before it is of any value, and it must be particularized through its modification in the light of concrete existing circumstances. In other words, general laws of human behavior known to us are altered and sometimes negated by the idiographic knowledge available to us concerning the personality we are studying.

It would seem to be an error for Lundberg to insist that "whether case workers know it or not, they have always employed a crude form of statistical method in arriving at the generalization from which they undertake to make diagnosis." Certainly he is in error if he means that knowledge

of human nature in general is all that the case worker uses in dealing with the single case. No nomothetist can tell what his wife would like for a Christmas present by applying the general laws of psychology. He can make this prediction correctly only by knowing his wife's particular patterns of interest and affection. If the reply is made that such knowledge is itself generalization from the wife's past behavior, well and good, but be it noted *it is the single life that is generalized:* in other words, it is purely idiographic knowledge that is employed. A wife's delight will obey certain *laws* in her nature, but the laws may be entirely peculiar to herself.

One additional argument must be offered: The most rigid tests of scientific procedure, fully admitted by nomothetists, are *understanding, prediction,* and *control* above the levels achieved by unaided common sense. Now, it will be shown in Chapter 11, that these rigid tests are met as readily by knowledge of the single case (secured often by means of personal documents) as by knowledge of nomothetic laws. When this demonstration is made it will clinch once and for all the case for admitting idiographic knowledge and idiographic procedure to the store of methods employed by psychological and by social science.

Enough has been said to justify broadening our basis of evaluation. Personal documents are good if they serve the comparison of lives, one with another, leading to statistical generalizations and to an understanding of uniformities of behavior. But they are good also if standing one by one they provide concrete evidence of the nature of single personal lives from which all psychological science is derived; if they yield evidence of pluralistic causation; if they give clinicians and practitioners a sounder basis for work; and if they enhance the understanding, prediction, and control of individual lives (which is all that science ultimately demands).

In the previous chapter a list of objectives was presented showing something of the diversity of purposes for which psychologists have found personal documents to have value. It would be possible to group these objectives under the broad headings of nomothetic and idiographic aims. When we speak, for example, of the "creative process," or of "mental effects of special physical conditions," we may have in mind the possibility of generalizing our findings or, on the other hand, of discovering how one specific individual creates, or how in some particular individual eye-defects served as a unique incentive for accomplishment. True, some of the objectives are exclusively nomothetic in aim: for example, the search for occupational types, or the analysis of documents preparatory to the construction of questionnaire items. On the other hand, certain objectives are exclusively idiographic: for example, autoanalytical therapy, supplementation to the psychiatrist's examination, and the subject's valuation and verification of studies made of him by another.

It should be repeated that sound value may lie in either line of research. Let us consider three or four examples, all of unquestioned scientific merit.

At one extreme lies the possibility of dealing with a massive population of personal documents from which uniform tendencies are sought. In order to study the interrelations of items (for the population as a whole but not for the single life) recourse may be had to the Hollerith sorting machine. An instance is the research of Van Tuyl (183, 184) who with the aid of an outline-guide has obtained comparable autobiographies from over a thousand students setting forth the salient facts of their religious experience. By employing a code of 150 items, each expressed in several degrees, and by machine sorting, a method is provided for tracing innumer-

able *common* relations throughout the population of documents analyzed. There is no doubt that many of the *general* tendencies relating to formative influences in religious belief and to the circumstances commonly connected with change in religious faith will be brought to light.

A similar mass study is that of D. Katz and F. H. Allport (107) applied to elaborate questionnaire data obtained from many hundreds of students in respect to their social attitudes. Innumerable statistical trends are disclosed. Fraternity members, it is found, are very much alike in certain respects; so too are students in different departments of the university. Those who have personal problems tend, too, to have religious problems (as did James's "sick souls"). There are students habitually institutional in their outlook upon life, and students habitually individualistic. These and many more tendencies common to the whole population of cases were brought to light. Without a shadow of a doubt a great deal can be obtained in the course of nomothetic investigations interested only in the statistical comparison of large numbers of cases.

An example of the less rigid type of nomothetic study is Charlotte Bühler's comparative analysis of biography (41), English summaries of which have been given by E. Frenkel (74) and G. W. Allport (8, p. 395f.; 218-220). This research, mentioned briefly in the last chapter, does not employ personal documents exclusively, but includes likewise objective records of accomplishment and third-person biographies of 200 famous personages, and an additional population of elderly institutional inmates. The subjective documents were found to be particularly valuable in constructing the *Erlebnis* curve of life which Bühler found to follow a characteristic course for most of the cases. A subjective feeling of expansion and self-assertion accompanies biological growth and prime;

feelings of restriction (frustration or resignation) follow this period. Subjectively, too, it is found that there is always progress from *approximation* to *definiteness* in the life's purposes. This phenomenon of growing differentiation and concreteness parallels the stages of transformation in life-goals which she expresses in terms of the concept of *Bestimmung*.

As pointed out in the last chapter, Bühler's work is largely inductive. She did not start her investigation with the predetermined concept of *Bestimmung*. It was forced upon her in the course of a sensitive reading and comparison of cases. It is a nomothetic product of an initially idiographic procedure. Though not strictly quantified, it stands as a definitely generalized principle.

Some critics have objected that seeking a common ground for diverse lives produces mostly truisms. Thus, Bühler's concept of *Bestimmung* has been said to reduce itself to the unenlightening proposition that *der Mensch wird älter*. This judgment is scarcely fair as any reader of the author's subtle analysis will agree, but it does point to the fact that the more cases included, the broader and less individualized does a generalization become.

Nomothetic studies inevitably take but one or, at the most, a very few aspects from concrete lives for the construction of generalizations. No two lives can be compared in every detail, and the more lives that are taken the fewer the common aspects become, until only a slender framework of universal laws of human nature results. By contrast, strictly idiographic studies maintain the richness and many-sidedness of personality and stay far away from the dangers of merely glittering generality.

Turning to a strictly idiographic type of investigation we may consider the self-analysis of Leonard (125). Manifestly motivated by a desire to rid himself of an agoraphobia, the

author at the age of 55 set down his memories of his life, stressing particularly the events related to his neurosis. Gifted as a writer, and prepared through years of self-analysis and the study of psychology, he performed his writing at a rapid rate, with a brilliance of style and degree of candor seldom found. Though aware of many psychological theories and concepts the author re-centers each according to the needs of his own case and introduces relationships for which psychologists have no previous model. The author challenges the psychologist, as it were, to account for his life, warning him over and over again not to leave salient experiences unaccounted for in the course of his theorizing, and not to pigeonhole hastily. The fact that self-deception undoubtedly creeps in does not dim the significance of the case. The psychologist is still challenged to account for Leonard the *individual:* for the valid portions of his narrative and for his self-deception as well.

So much for Leonard's document and its invitation to idiographic research. But what can the psychologist do about it? What does it mean to do idiographic research? For one thing Taylor and Culler (177) collected the views of various psychological readers of the book, showing the different ways in which explanation and conceptualization for this particular life had been attempted. More might have been done by examining these views for the light they might throw on the *nature* of understanding the single case (11). Pooling of diagnostic judgments could have been attempted; so too predictions for the future course of Leonard's life. Backward inferences (post dictions) could be tried for events not recorded in the autobiography but traceable. Controlled experiments of a therapeutic nature are a possibility; so too the seeking of supporting data from independent sources in order to study the validity of the document and the problem of

the diversity of aspects under which a single life may be viewed. Baldwin's method (16) of studying the structure of an individual's thought life through the frequency of his associational linkages could be applied. In short, there are innumerable possibilities in idiographic research—some quantitative, some qualitative—all deserving more attention than psychological science has yet given them.

CONCLUSION

Although personal documents have been profitably employed in mass investigations, it is not possible to evaluate fully their contribution to social and to psychological science so long as an exclusively nomothetic outlook prevails. Not until we are prepared to dwell upon the unique patterning of personality, and to concede that lawfulness need not be synonymous with frequency of occurrence in a population, and to admit that prediction, understanding, and control are scientific goals attainable in the handling of one case and of one case alone—not until then are we in a position to assess the full value of personal documents. Nomothetic studies are all to the good, but by no means do they exhaust the usefulness of first-person documents for a science that will admit the idiographic as well as the nomothetic perspective.

Part II

The Forms of Personal Documents

Chapter 5

Why Do People Write Personal Documents?

THE FOLLOWING OUTLINE summarizes the forms in which personal documents are found. The many varieties of *third-person* case studies, life histories, interview-reporting, psycho-portraits, biographies, institutional records, etc., are not included, for it is only with first-person documents that we are here concerned.

I Autobiographies
- A Comprehensive
- B Topical
- C Edited

II Questionnaires

III Verbatim Recording
- A Interviews
- B Dreams
- C Confessions

IV Diaries
- A Intimate Journals
- B Memoirs
- C Log-Inventories

V Letters

VI Expressive and Projective Documents
- A Literature
- B Compositions
- C Art Forms
- D Projective Productions
- E Automatic Writing
- F Various

In the following chapters a closer description of each of these forms will be given. For the present we shall attempt to answer the questions why personal documents are produced at all, and what the motivation behind them has to do with their psychological value.

But first, a word concerning the *extent* to which they are employed. A study of entries in the *Psychological Index* before 1927, and of the *Psychological Abstracts* thereafter fails to indicate their popularity, for the reason that documents are often employed in the course of an investigation but not mentioned in the title or in the abstract of the study. If this inadequate source alone were trusted, fewer than 10 studies a year would seem to feature the use of personal documents, but this estimate is too meager.

Indirect light comes from a study by Bruner and Allport (39) which traces interest in the single case through psychological periodicals over a period of fifty years at decade intervals. Personal documents as such were not listed in this study, but the finding that a relatively small and decreasing number of investigations is devoted to single cases (idiographic research) is of interest. The percentage of periodical literature devoted to *single* case studies in 1888 and 1898 (combined) was 16.3; in 1908, 7.6; in 1918, 4.5; in 1928, 6.7; in 1938, 4.9.

Although these figures do not prove that *personal documents* have been used at a decreasing rate during the past 40 years (because many case studies do not employ first-person documents at all, and because many investigations that do, are not studies of the single case), still this evidence does establish the fact that *idiographic* interest in first-person productions is neither high, nor, so far as we can see, increasing.

Offsetting this evidence, we know from the citations in Chapter 2 that since 1920 a vigorous, critical interest in such documents has arisen, and that the publication of recent suc-

cessful researches may be expected to encourage the expansion of the method.[1]

WHY ARE PERSONAL DOCUMENTS WRITTEN?

A gross dichotomy of motives could be made in terms of the original incentive to writing. Did the author spontaneously create his product or did he do so at the instigation of some outsider (perhaps a psychologist)? Since valuable documents have been secured under both types of instigation there is no special merit in making this distinction. More illuminating is a classification in respect to the *intention* of the author. Krueger and Reckless (118) state that all personal documents are either *confessional* in character or *detached,* but this rough distinction fails to reveal subtler shades of motivation. Burgess (164) suggests a slightly more elaborate set of motives in his fourfold classification of autobiographers: *chroniclers, self-defenders, confessants,* and *self-analysts.* The motives in diary writing are explored by Ponsonby (148); Burr (43) has listed additional reasons for the writing of autobiographies. Combining these classifications, we may distinguish approximately a dozen motives that underlie the production of personal documents. In any concrete production, of course, it is likely that not one but several motives are operating.

1. *Special Pleading.* A writer may outdo himself to prove that he is more sinned against than sinning. He may blame others for failure to understand him, expatiate on their faults, and, not rarely, ascribe to them faults that are outstanding in himself. In their cruder forms such self-justification and

[1] The writer regards the following researches dealing with personal documents especially provocative and likely to call for imitators in method, for challenging counter-studies, and for critical discussion: Allport, Bruner, Jandorf (12), Baldwin (16), Bender (22), Blos (28), Blumer (29), Cantril (45), Cartwright and French (47), Davis and Dollard (57), Frenkel-Brunswik (75), Henry (93), Komarovsky (113), Nicolaysen (140), Polansky (147), Stanford (160), Stouffer (172).

projection are easy to detect, but not so in their subtler forms. Yet even the self-hagiography has its use, for though the story cannot be taken at its face value, it discloses artifices and forms of self-deception of interest to the psychologist. It is probable that no autobiography is entirely free from self-justification, and the more extreme and obvious this process, the more value it may have in helping the psychologist to isolate and study the mechanisms at work.

2. *Exhibitionism.* Closely related is the document in which egotism runs riot. The author seeks always to display himself in as vivid a light as possible. Sins as well as virtues may be exposed with such relish and satisfaction that we are likely to dismiss the author as hopelessly narcissistic. It is true that all personal documents by their very nature are egotistic productions, but few have as grotesque a flavor of exhibitionism as, let us say, Rousseau's *Confessions* which opens with the following bit of self-display:

> I have entered upon a performance which is without example, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to present my fellow-mortals with a man in all the integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself. . . .
>
> Whenever the last trumpet shall sound, I will present myself before the sovereign Judge with this book in my hand, and loudly proclaim thus have I acted; these were my thoughts; such was I. With equal freedom and veracity have I related what was laudable or wicked; I have concealed no crimes, added no virtues. . . . I have declared myself; sometimes vile and despicable; at others, virtuous, generous, and sublime; even as thou hast read my inmost soul. Power eternal! assemble round thy throne an innumerable throng of my fellow-mortals, let them listen to my confessions, let them blush at my depravity, let them tremble at my sufferings; let each in his turn express with equal sincerity the failings, the wanderings, of his heart and, if he dare, aver, *I was better than that man.*

3. *Desire for Order.* Just as there are people who continually tidy their rooms and order their possessions, so there are diary keepers who cannot sleep at night until certain experiences of the day are entered in writing. This motiva-

tion may become compulsive in character; it seemed to be so with Pepys. On the other hand, there are methodical individuals who like to record their experiences just as they like to budget their expenditures. Much of the product is dull and uneventful, but much of it, because of its very lack of dramatic accentuation, is true to life.

4. *Literary Delight.* The narrowly aesthetic motive can be traced in innumerable literary biographies wherein personal experience is revealed in a delicate and pleasing way. Symmetry, perfection of expression, artistic form, are obviously intended by the author. The document may be as idyllic as Selma Lagerlöf's *Mårbacka* or as vigorous as Theodore Dreiser's *Dawn;* but in any case the aesthetic motivation is paramount.

5. *Securing Personal Perspective.* Many sincere autobiographies are attempts to take stock at a crossroads in life, frequently in advanced years. H. G. Wells gives this as the prime motivation for writing his *Experiment in Autobiography.* It is likewise regarded as an important motivation by Stern (137) who does not think that a personal document can be produced to order at any arbitrary point in a person's life, but must wait until there is a period of change and transition which brings with it a desire for stock-taking or for planning new lines of action. Documents written with this workmanlike incentive are likely to be dispassionate, sincere, and mature. It is a motive that might be appealed to by psychologists for obtaining a larger supply of documents from adults and elderly people, as well as from college students, especially seniors, who are facing a turning point in their lives.

6. *Relief from Tension.* Krueger (117) maintains that catharsis is the underlying motive in the production of confessional documents. Through writing one secures relief from mental tension which often results from a disturbance

of adjustments in human association bringing with it a loss of the sense of individuality and of personal worth. When no other relief is in sight the sufferer expresses himself in a rush of feeling. Some of the most vivid confessional documents in existence race along madly until the early death of their authors, sometimes by suicide. The journals of Bashkirtseff (20), Ptaschkina (152), and Barbellion (17, 18) are examples.

G. Stanley Hall (86) has made the point that the frequently exaggerated confessionalism found in adolescence may serve as a harmless vent for tendencies that would cause trouble if directed toward practical life. In this sense the document is an action-substitute or action-silencer. It is a form of behavior that expresses unsocialized impulses. As such, it has unique merit, but runs the risk of overstressing the wayward and unacceptable side of life: conforming behavior and the socialized self are not given due weight.

7. *Monetary Gain.* To turn to an abrupt contrast in motives, we find documents secured in response to a prize competition (12), (197), or obtained for payment of money (139), (181). Mercenary motives do not seem to diminish quality, although it seems probable that in all cases where payment has secured excellent documents the authors have been attracted to the task for other reasons as well.

8. *Assignment.* The investigator may have other holds on the writer. In college courses students can be required to write autobiographies. (It is unwise to make this requirement rigid and inescapable. Experience shows that when students are given their option in writing either an autobiography or a case study of some other personality, the majority—often 80 per cent—choose to write about themselves. By giving this option there is no element of compulsion and no accusation of bad taste.) In writing under such conditions, the student at first is merely carrying out an assigned task, but in the

process of writing, his interest becomes deeper and personal motives are brought into play. Nearly all students like the assignment and are grateful for the incentive to produce a personal document.

9. *Assisting in Therapy.* It is obvious that the patient who produces an autobiography for a psychiatrist does so in order to assist in his own cure. He takes the physician into his confidence and has every reason to tell the truth. Documents of this type, however, are likely to be limited to the disordered condition for which relief is sought.

It is not only the psychiatrist who obtains autobiographical documents motivated by a desire for help. Counselors, teachers, social workers, clergymen, and friends find them offered for the same purpose. The catharsis of writing, the breaking of inhibitions, and the advice obtained, all contribute to the therapy. Over and over do we hear the personal document extoled for its hygienic merit.

10. *Redemption and Social Re-incorporation.* Confession is the pre-condition of absolution. Religious confession before the priest has as its aim a restoration of status as a child of God and a member of the Christian community. Secular confessions serve a similar purpose. The peccavis of the criminal, the spy, the social parasite, the ingrate, contain implicit pleas for forgiveness and social re-acceptance.

11. *Scientific Interest.* Cultivated individuals, notably college students, will frequently offer their diaries or their candid autobiographies to psychologists interested in problems of personality. Each is convinced that his life experience is unique, that he has suffered what others have not suffered, that scientists may find his story novel and significant. Sometimes the student of psychology feels that the science of human nature as he knows it has nowhere taken account of his own forms of experience, and he therefore yields up his

document for the purpose of enlarging the outlook and sharpening the perspicacity of the science he finds so inadequate.

12. *Public Service and Example.* There are documents manifestly written to achieve a reform, to offer a model or a warning, to help others through their difficulties. Clifford Beers was interested in improving the lot of the insane; Booker T. Washington, that of the Negro; Jane Addams, that of the slum dweller. Though bent on reform and centered outward, these documents may disclose poignant reflections of human thought and feeling.

13. *Desire for Immortality.* Marie Bonaparte (31) points out the significance of personal documents in man's "battle against oblivion." If "to be forgotten is to die a second and more complete death," we must expect to find diaries and autobiographies written for the purpose of assuring personal identity after death. This motive clearly underlies Barbellion's *Journal of a Disappointed Man,* and is likewise explicit in Marie Bashkirtseff's journal. It seems, however, to be a motive which, if not rare, at least is seldom expressed.

The question of what *unconscious* motives may operate in the production of personal documents is puzzling. Speaking of confessional documents Darlington (55) asserts that they are symptomatic of oral-eroticism. But he does not prove his assertion. Compulsive neuroticism, narcissism, latent aggression, may all operate in the production of documents. A detailed analysis of any given life would be necessary to establish their presence. It is true that the motives listed above express primarily *conscious intentions* and for this reason they are not to be taken as exhaustive. On the other hand, it is perilous to invoke unconscious motives where clearly manifest intentions provide adequate explanation for the document's existence. To do so prejudices the interpretation of

a document. Often too, it will be found that the unconscious factors are merely deeper layers of the conscious motives listed above. For example, our category of *special pleading* seems to cover all of the projective and defense mechanisms of which psychoanalysts are fond of speaking.

There is one class of documents to which the discussion in this chapter does not apply—the unintentional or incidental document. As we shall see in Chapter 9, literary compositions, paintings, moving pictures, sound-recordings, are, in a sense, personal documents. In these instances, however, the product is not intentionally self-revealing and does not deal directly with one's own life. The motivations operating are the motivations characteristic of creativity in general.

Chapter 6

Autobiographies

THE COMMONEST FORM of the personal document is the autobiography. If it is long and many-sided we may speak of a *comprehensive* autobiography; if it is short and specialized in content, of a *topical* autobiography; if it is not strictly in the author's own words, but none the less a piece of direct reporting, of an *edited* autobiography.

For historical and critical investigations of the autobiographical form of writing it is necessary to consult the works of nonpsychological writers; for example the standard studies of Misch (134), Burr (43), and Roberts (156).[1] The first famous autobiography in European literature was St. Augustine's. The Renaissance brought Cellini's. Later came Casanova's, Rousseau's, and Franklin's. Gradually the flood increased until now we have an annual torrent of backward glances, stories of one's life, pilgrims' ways, reminiscences, voyages, recollections. Psychologists for the most part, however, seem to prefer unpublished materials from writers whom they can control through instructions, interviews, and supplementary study.

Published documents, it is true, have the advantage of editorial criticism and literary quality, and are likely to possess social or artistic significance, representing as they do the lives

[1] The New Oxford English Dictionary ascribes the earliest known use of the word *autobiography* to Carlyle who in 1809 wrote, "What would we give for such an autobiography of Shakespeare."

of the more distinguished and more articulate portion of mankind. On the other hand, considerations of conventionality and good taste, of obscenity and libel, of profit-making and standards set by critics, put a mask upon the product disturbing to the psychologist's purposes. He, like the sociologist, has discovered the exceptional value that lies in the productions of ordinary people and of the poorly educated and morally deviant.

THE COMPREHENSIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Even the longest of personal documents is selective, condensed, and incomplete. Hence, what we call a *comprehensive* autobiography is one that deals with a relatively large number of lines of experience, giving a picture of variety, roundness and interrelatedness in the life. An example is *Experiment in Autobiography* by H. G. Wells (188) which has the purpose of depicting at successive stages of development the integration of traits and experiences so that the structure of the life as a whole emerges. Much shorter documents may, in lesser degree, achieve the same integral effort.

The great merit of an autobiography is that it gives the "inside half" of the life; the half that is hidden from the objectively-minded scientist. To be sure, the inside half is not wholly known even to the autobiographer, and what he knows he may dress up, prettify, before exposing it to view. And yet the risks of conscious and unconscious deception, while they complicate the scientist's task, in principle may actually enhance the potential value of the document.

In reading an autobiography the psychologist must distinguish between the record of experience and the interpretations imposed upon this record by the writer. In general, the experiences of frustration, bewilderment, desire, suffering, hope, are more vivid and convincing than the author's interpretations, explanations, and conceptualizations of these

experiences. The psychologist naturally prefers to make or apply his own theories to fit the case. If the interpretation is left to the writer, one of three things is likely to happen: (a) popular or conventional explanations are offered; (b) an oversimplified version is given (for example, many students' autobiographies reflect a special fondness for simple Adlerian explanations); (c) the writer defies science to "explain" his case. None of these courses is likely to please the psychologist. He generally criticizes the author's interpretation, perhaps going to the extreme of explaining the life entirely in terms of the operation of totally unconscious mechanisms.[2]

As a rule autobiographical writing seems to be preoccupied with *conflict,* with what Krueger (117) has called the "personality-making" situations of life. Happy, peaceful periods of time are usually passed over in silence. A few lines may tell of many serene years whereas pages may be devoted to a single humiliating episode or to an experience of suffering. Writers seem driven to elaborate on the conditions that have wrecked their hopes and deprived them of satisfactions. Of lasting happiness, conditions of good health, high morale, and pleasant routine, they have little to say. Personality, looked at longitudinally, does seem to be a succession of organization—disorganization—reorganization. But in interpreting this cycle, the psychologist should not overlook the silent process of stabilization, nor the immunities and the balancing factors about which the writer may have little or nothing to report. Imbalance may *seem* to prevail in an autobiography whereas balance may be the true mark of the life as a whole.

No one appears yet to have asked why autobiographies (and indeed all personal documents) are so interesting to read. The reason, in part, may be that the reader semiconsciously

[2] Compare Murray's case of Ernst (139).

reflects on his own life as he reads about another's, and his interest accordingly stems from his own self-love. But there is something more. Sustained attention to the single case or single episode is, as we have seen, the very essence of idiographic knowledge which seems, as Bergson asserts, to have preferential value for the human mind. We normally fixate the concrete, and find it more natural to contemplate than the nomothetic abstractions for which our attention has to be trained. By allowing himself to participate in autobiography or in any gripping drama of human life, the psychological and social scientist recovers time after time a fresh sense of the reality and vitality of his field of study. He benefits from allowing his mind to run in its natural channels.

The problem of the early life is always a stumbling block in autobiographical writings. Reminiscence does not extend back to infancy, while, according to prevailing theories, this formative period is of vital significance in slanting the personality. And even where reminiscence reaches there is likely to be an obscuring overlay deposited by later experience and by interpretation. As an objection to autobiographies, it is this nonreliability of early memories that is most frequently mentioned by the psychologists who wrote their own life stories (137).

In part this objection must be admitted, and entered on the red side of the ledger. There are good grounds, however, for maintaining that genetic psychology, under the influence of Freudianism, may have overstated the importance of character formation in the earliest years. An era of nativism is returning in psychology with new studies of constitutional determinants and of hereditary influences. If the roots of personality lie in the germ plasm, autobiography of course cannot reach them (though speculations on the qualities of one's ancestors does play a prominent part in many docu-

ments). Autobiography, we must admit, does badly with both the germ plasm and with early life.

But is this criticism fatal? Genetic psychologists may think that it is, but there are grounds for dissent. Motives leading to activity, it may be argued, are always operative at the time the activity takes place. Inherited tendencies or the experiences of early life are, as it were, wound up afresh at successive stages in one's history. That which drives, drives *now*. If this reasoning be sound, the autobiography may in fact give a *truer* picture of motivation in its active condition at various stages of life than does a wholly anachronistic picture of what was once operative in a life (but is no longer operative). To state the point in another way: the present contains the past in the only fashion in which the past has any functional significance at all. From this point of view autobiographies may be regarded as more adequate revelations of motivation than the hereditarian, the Freudian, or the genetic psychologist commonly believes.

The autobiographies of children have little value. Until the age of 13 or after, the child records events wholly in external terms. He writes not "I felt this . . . I thought that," but rather, "I did this . . . I did that." Subjective life grows important as adulthood approaches, and after puberty there is less dependence upon surrounding influences than in childhood.

An interesting phenomenon arises in the writer's loss of perspective upon recent events. As the recorded story approaches the time of writing it seems to fan out, delta-wise, into many shallow and obscure channels. The writer cannot evaluate the significance of recent events. He remembers the most recent year of his life best, but is unable to evaluate its happenings in respect to their importance for the future.

The channels of the past are clearer. It is on the present that perspective is lacking. For this reason it is often a good plan to stop in autobiographical composition at some definite point in the past—perhaps two or three years previous to the time of writing.

TOPICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Whereas the comprehensive autobiography is by its very nature likely to fix the investigator's attention, in an idiographic manner, upon the unique patterns of the life, the topical document, representing an excision from the life, invites comparison, abstraction, and generalization. For this reason we find that topical autobiographies generally exist in *collections* gathered with a view to comparative study and inductive use. A few examples will serve to show the variety of scientific purposes such topical documents may serve.

Interested in the oneiroid, or dreamlike, states of psychotics, Mayer-Gross (131) collected self-descriptive accounts from patients after their partial or complete recovery. Though it is impossible to check the veracity of reports upon delusions, yet, to a marked degree, the patient's recall tallied with records of their behavior and speech during the acute phase of their psychoses. From his material the author creates a new descriptive category for psychiatry—and so demonstrates the inductive use of a special class of topical autobiographies.

A somewhat more inclusive use of topical autobiographies is the study of Allport, Bruner, and Jandorf (12) based upon a comparative analysis of 90 refugee documents assembled in response to a prize competition. The topic assigned, "My Life in Germany before and after January 30, 1933," brought in over 200 manuscripts, averaging 100 pages in length, nearly all written in German. Elaborately prepared schedules were used by a corps of readers to facilitate an analysis

of the documents, all of which were topical in the sense of focusing upon the effects of one social event.[3]

As pointed out in Chapter 3, none of the major conclusions of the study were anticipated in the pre-arranged schedule for analysis—proof that it is possible for the investigator to take from personal documents more than he himself puts into them. The findings may be stated briefly in order to illustrate how inductive generalizations can emerge from the exploratory use of topical documents.

(1) When analyzed, these autobiographies showed conclusively that a variety of protective mechanisms operate to prevent the individual in a catastrophic social situation from realizing the gravity of the occasion and thus from making appropriate forms of adjustments. (2) Attitudes in times of crises become extreme (U-shaped distribution); deepen in intensity; and come to have greater spread (range of equivalence). (3) Personalities show themselves to be markedly consistent throughout the crisis. Each takes the catastrophe in a characteristic way, and the personality displays much less disorganization than the social structure in which it moves. (4) The subjects' responses to frustration are more varied and more subtle than the current theory concerning the alleged relation of frustration and aggression would allow. This theory, therefore, is shown to need correction. (5) Evidence of severe mental conflict in the Nazi persecutors is so striking that one may question whether the Nazi type of personality-dissociation can for long endure.

Stouffer (172) has collected autobiographies of subjects' attitudes toward prohibition. These, in contrast to the foregoing example, comprise topical documents in a narrow sense. Hall's studies of anger and fear (87, 88) likewise illustrate

[3] Additional use of the data from the sociologist's point of view is being planned by E. Y. Hartshorne. The present discussion concerns only the results of the psychological analysis.

narrow topical autobiographies; so too Clark's (52), Starbuck's (169), and Van Tuyl's (183) studies of religious experiences. Similarly, we have Wallin's (186) collection of episodes related to the mental hygiene problems of students; Symonds' study of motivation among teachers (174); Breslaw's (37) accounts of the radical-conservative tendencies in 100 lives. There are many other possible illustrations of topical autobiographies. They seem to provide a favorite class of material for psychological scientists who both assign the topic and prescribe the conditions for writing.

Before leaving this class of documents it is well to mention a borderland where the comprehensive and the topical autobiographies merge. For example, an autobiography called for in a course in sociology might stress memberships, status, and race, but omit many features of interest to psychologists. Though presented as a comprehensive document, it may be merely cultural, and hence, topical. Or again, writers with a strong Freudian bias may emphasize exclusively early life and sexual experience. The product is topical rather than comprehensive. Similarly, stories of mental disturbance may vary from one that is clearly topical such as Beers (21), to one like Leonard's (125) in which the mental disorder does not take up the whole of the scene.

EDITED AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

First-person documents tend to be bulky; likewise at times, ungrammatical, repetitious, badly organized, and partly illegible. No wonder that investigators often economize in space and enhance essential clarity by imposing their own editorial judgment, especially if the document is to be published. For many purposes there is gain rather than loss in such editing. The investigator is bound to place his own stamp of interpretation upon the case sooner or later, and through deliberate selection of what to him seems essential in a docu-

ment, and deliberate exclusion of what he considers to be nonessential, he starts his course of interpretation when he edits. Selection of this sort takes place in virtually all scientific procedures. Even the experimentalist does not tell all; he tells what to him, as a competent investigator, seems relevant. So it is with the editor of personal documents.

There are, however, occasions in which editorial liberties are out of place. When style of expression, forms of speech, level of education, fantasies, dreams, and subtleties of experience are in question, the original material must be published unedited, and if possible, unshortened. Errors of orthography may be corrected if they are inconsequential for the purpose for which the document is used; but for some purposes they must be left unaltered.

Rules are hard to establish for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate editing. When many liberties are taken it is clear that the personal document passes over into a third-person case study; and it is more candid in such instances to present it as such. On the other hand, if a mild amount of condensation, rearrangement, and grammatical correction is introduced for the sake of clarity, not altering the value of the document for the purpose for which it is used, it seems fair enough to retain the vivid, interesting, first-person style (informing the reader, of course, that editing has occurred).

Henry's *Study of Sex Variants* (93). A recent and important instance of the use of edited autobiographies is the research sponsored by the Committee for the Study of Sex Variants. Although medical examinations, personality tests, anthropometric measures, social case histories, and a follow-up questionnaire were employed, the weight of the investigation rested primarily upon 80 "personal histories" recorded in vivid autobiographical style, composed of verbatim statements from the interviews, and edited to make a connected

history. The respondents included 40 men and 40 women for whom extensive medical and anthropometric data were available. The authors regarded the personal document as invaluable for gaining "social understanding" of the problem and for arousing sympathy with the patient in his own peculiar form of distress.

In presenting each of the 80 case histories, the general procedure consisted in first offering approximately one page of initial general impressions, then one page of hereditary data presented by chart, four pages or so of family background (given in first-person style), approximately 10 pages of personal history, stressing early sex development, reactions to parents, sex experiences, and present adjustment. Then followed a page or so of roentgenological and other physical data, a couple of pages of comment, and a good thumbnail summary of the case. From the personal history we gain a vivid picture of the sexual side of the personalities in question, but very little else. Professional life, nonsexual interests, avocational pursuits, philosophies of life, are all excluded. The autobiographies are topical: so much so that the reader may even wonder whether such clinical pictures are not misleading because so little is told of the life in which aberrant sexuality is set. The study does not succeed as does Bender's (22) in showing the *embeddedness* of an aberration within the total personality. In Henry's investigation we get only occasional glimpses of personality within a matrix of sex; but we do not see sexuality within the matrix of personality—a truer perspective.

The conclusions reached in Henry's investigation are of interest because they demonstrate the tempering influence that the extended use of personal documents has upon generalized pronouncements. Since each life is to such a degree unique (even in its biological drives) overall laws are found

to be out of place. Note that the character of the three following conclusions derives from the clinical consideration of each single case in its patterned complexity. (1) The constitutional deficiencies of the subject appeared least in respect to physical structure, next in relation to physiological functions, and most in the strictly psychological realm; (2) the roles of heredity and environment do not stand out in any manner determinable from the study of averages, but in each *single* case the causation and interaction become much clearer (a personalistic view of the heredity-environment controversy). (3) In general a theory of masculine and feminine components in every individual is favored. Though tomboys and sissies start their psychosexual development with a handicap, most (though not all) can be helped by emphasis upon the desired component.

For our purposes the importance of this investigation lies in the fact that the personal document was employed not merely as a contributing instrument, but as the *central* instrument in an expensive, reputable, and significant piece of research representing the combined interests of medical, psychological, and social sciences. In it the personal document clearly comes into its own.

Chapter 7

Questionnaires and Verbatim Records

QUESTIONNAIRES range in type from loosely knit interrogations that serve to suggest topics for the guidance of freely written documents, to tight and compact check-lists from which the subject selects a limited number of attributes which he is willing to ascribe to himself. When such a check-list yields score-values on the basis of previous standardization, and when these scores can be summed to yield a final diagnostic rating, we have the attitude-test or personality-test or the public-opinion ballot. Somewhere in this continuum of techniques from the guiding questions to the rigid test, the method of the personal document vanishes and the method of measurement begins.

The line, it seems, should be drawn at the point where *the wording of the answer* passes from the subject's control to the investigator's control. By this criterion the test or the ballot is not a personal document. On the other hand, marginal comments, or reasons given by the subject for his answers (if in his own words), may be considered brief but authentic personal documents. In Chapter 1 it was said that introspection of the sort obtained in phenomenological research should in principle be labeled a personal document. The question has been raised by Krueger (117) whether this label should apply to self-reporting that does not have the *life* of the subject as its theme. But since introspective reports

and marginalia upon tests and ballots do treat some *aspect* of the subject's life it would be difficult to exclude them while letters, records of dreams, or topical autobiographies are admitted. This particular issue, however, is not of crucial significance, for a rigid scheme of classification is not required. There are bound to be many borderline personal documents to which our methodological considerations apply only in part.

Clearly included, however, are those comprehensive or topical biographies written in the subject's own words in response to a questionnaire-guide. A number of psychiatrists, psychologists, and sociologists have developed such instruments. The purpose of guides is *to insure that omissions from the document be based upon the subject's own judgment rather than upon his forgetfulness or negligence.* Among the earlier guides (prepared in the first quarter of the present century) are those of Baade, Lipmann, Stern (14), Yerkes and La Rue (193), Lasurski (123), F. L. Wells (187), and F. H. Allport (2). More recently have appeared the schedules of Chassell (51), Huth (97), H. A. Murray (139), K. Young (196), and others. In certain cases these guides are designed for third-person use, but all are readily adapted to use by the subject himself.

Without some guide writers are likely to omit large, and perhaps critical, areas of their lives. These omissions limit the value of the document and may mislead the clinical reader who fails to receive a balanced and comprehensive impression of the individual as a whole. They likewise prevent effective comparison of documents, since the topics that one writer stresses another may forget to include. Thus, both for idiographic and nomothetic objectives the use of guides can be justified.

There are, however, dangers in employing questionnaires

of this (or any) type. The document may become stilted, a merely mechanical series of answers to questions. Even if the spontaneity and style are not hopelessly impaired, a questionnaire inevitably suggests a distribution of weights and time to the writer. The resulting emphasis in the document is determined less by the subjective interests and pressures in the subject than by the investigator's suggestions to him. Stern's statement of the case (171) and advice for avoiding the danger should be quoted:

> One source of error that clings to even the best written questionnaires raises a consideration of a personalistic character. All that is received from the respondent is a series of statements arbitrarily drawn from his life, and there is no way whatever of knowing what it signifies in terms of the total person. Therefore, the attempt is now made to supplement the purely extensive questionnaire with a qualitative questionnaire through which the psychologist presents his questions directly to a small number of people whom he knows personally, and with whom he discusses the replies. (171, p. 65)

To a large extent these objections to the employment of the questionnaire-guide may be avoided by adequate instruction to the subject. He can be encouraged to use it as an incidental and not compulsory aid; he can be told to disregard questions having no vital application to his life; he can be encouraged to rearrange his exposition so that the order of topics suits his own convenience and style. In short, the suggestive influence of the guide can to some extent be counteracted so that only its value as a prod to memory remains.

While the questionnaire-guide may have some merit for obtaining comprehensive self-reports it is virtually indispensable for collecting topical autobiographies. When the investigator seeks information upon special topics, he has to define the scope of his inquiry for the subject, telling him what sorts of items to include and what to exclude. Most topical autobiographies are used for nomothetic research. For

this reason it is essential that documents be comparable, and in order to secure comparability *Leitfragen* are required.

VERBATIM RECORDS

Interviews. Another borderland in the field of personal documents is reached in the vast domain of interviewing. Suppose the interviewer makes notes on the subject's statements, can we consider the product a personal document or not? The criterion seems to be whether the subject's own words are accurately and completely (or almost completely) recorded. Sound-recording is becoming more and more widely used. Surely the distinction between a verbatim sound-record of an interview and a document written in response to a questionnaire is not significant. Hence, verbatim records on disks, tape, by shorthand, or by rapid longhand, must be admitted.

The methodological problems of interviewing, like those of tests and measurements, are unique, and cannot be considered in the present survey. Bingham and Moore (26) and Harvey (90) tell what some of these problems are. But the personal document and its attendant methodological problems come into being only after the interview is recorded.

An example of a prolonged recorded interview (an entire psychoanalysis) is the unusual document obtained by Zinn (198). Here we have a notable record of the analytic process, embracing the free associations of a schizophrenic patient. The document has perfect fidelity, is permanent, and constitutes an objective record free from editing or interpretation that might damage its value as unblemished scientific evidence. On the other hand, its dimensions are staggering. Without editing or deletion the reader is confronted with all the patient's wanderings, false starts, repetitions, lacerations of syntax and grammar—the total effect being so confusing that one may ask whether the loss in meaning and

structure does not offset the gain. For some purposes, to be sure, the disorderly record with all its hesitations, false starts, and cryptic verbal symbols is good psychological raw material. For other purposes—for simple diagnosis and treatment—it seems that much of this painful detail is out of place. Too much patience is required in the deciphering. But it is quite likely that this particular document is not a fair sample of what prolonged verbatim records will be. After all a schizophrenic is not a typical subject.

For an entirely different purpose, the detailed analysis of individual differences in the use of language, F. H. Sanford (160) has recorded without the subjects' knowledge prolonged "speech samples." These spontaneous personal documents not only yielded measurable differences, but enabled the investigator to represent in all their complexity the patterns of style and symbolism peculiar to individual speakers. In this study we have suggestions of a new and exceptionally promising technique, not only for study of language, but for the investigation of any expressive activity that can be recorded.

Dreams. It is the practice of many psychoanalysts and consultants to ask their patients or clients to bring in records of their dreams, written down if possible immediately on awakening. Freud has seriously questioned whether such records are useful since "the resistance from which he (the patient) may have preserved the text of the dream will then transfer itself to the associations and render the manifest dream inaccessible for interpretation" (79, p. 25). However, no personal document is entirely free from the dangers of self-deception (if it were, it would scarcely be necessary to submit it to a psychologist for study), and Freud's objection does not affect our admission of dream reports to the category of personal documents.

For all his strictures on the technique, Freud himself has produced the most remarkable of all dream documents. His *Traumdeutung* (78) is to a large extent an analysis of his own dreams, and has supplied his biographer, Wittels (192), with materials dealing with "flaws in his character" that most biographers of other men are denied. Yet Wittels himself complains that Freud, in writing it, was himself "subject to remarkable inhibitions." The biographer goes on to say, however, that the publication of dreams is a wholly different matter from submitting them privately to the psychoanalyst, and for this reason Freud's book while not intended as such does not offer a final measure of the true value of this type of personal document.

Since this is not the place to enter into a consideration of the controversial problems of dream analysis, all that we need to say is that dream records constitute an entirely practicable form of the personal document, and probably one of the few avenues to the unconscious regions of personality, though the extent to which this latter statement is true is not known. It should be added that published case studies that include dream records are common, especially in psychoanalytic journals. Their brevity and condensation make them attractive personal documents to use in publication, especially if the investigator himself is persuaded of their value and uses them as an economical demonstration of the leading facts in the case.

Confession. A number of social scientists have pointed out the potential use of the confession. Struggling to regain self-respect, to be re-incorporated into the group, the penitent drops all pretext, and gives a record of his thoughts and actions unusually free from self-deception. Pettazzoni (144) and Del Greco (60) discuss the cathartic significance of confession for the individual, particularly in relation to personal crises,

and its scientific significance for the psychologist. Bain (15) believes that the motive behind the confession insures a report of unique value, especially if the confessor is a stranger or merely casual acquaintance. The confession is limited to the sins of the individual; he does not comment upon his virtues, and the prescriptions of form and of inviolacy create practical barriers to the use of the religious confession for research purposes. There is no reason, however, why confessors, who include consulting psychologists, psychiatrists, and others not bound by ecclesiastical rules, should not make discreet and anonymous use of these outpourings. They can scarcely help using them to enrich their own understanding of human nature.

The therapeutic value of the confessional has been repeatedly discussed, apparently always with favorable judgment. It is even recommended by Sheehy as a device to be employed in connection with student counseling (165). But, on the whole, it seems likely that the confessional cannot, without distortion and reduction of value, be appropriated for scientific use except in an incidental way. Its major significance lies in value for the penitent and in its enrichment of the confessor's own store of wisdom.

CONCLUSION

Questionnaire-guides are commonly employed to insure adequacy and comparability of responses in personal documents, especially in topical autobiographies. No single standard or widely-used guide can be selected for universal use, for there is a tendency on the part of each investigator to employ his own, according to the needs of his research. It would be desirable, however, for some psychologist to collect and combine existing guides so that a truly comprehensive outline for self-study might be available. Such an undertaking, however, will run into a major difficulty, namely the

selection of headings and subdivisions. Whatever scheme is chosen, it will impose implicit conceptualization upon the resulting document, unless the user is effectively instructed to take wide liberties with the guide that is offered.

Verbatim recording is rapidly increasing in use, owing, in part, to the invention of efficient and invisible sound-recording devices. Verbatim records are true personal documents, and due to the control possible over the subject and over the circumstances of the interview their popularity is likely to increase at the expense of spontaneous uncontrolled documents. This step toward standardizing the method of the personal document has its merits, though it may sacrifice the spontaneity of self-written accounts produced by the subject in his own way, in solitude, and at his own convenience.

Chapter 8

Diaries and Letters

THE SPONTANEOUS, intimate diary is the personal document par excellence. In it the author sets down only such events, thoughts, and feelings as have importance for himself; he is not so constrained by the task-attitudes that frequently control his production in letters, interviews, or autobiography. He is ordinarily more subjective in his reactions than he is in any other form of writing, and much less self-conscious. As a rule, he himself is the audience for which he is writing, or else there is some imaginary friend who, when told all, will understand all and forgive all. Whatever rationalizations enter into a diary are self-deceptions, and for this reason are of greater significance for the writer's personality than are the masquerades that may cloud his public utterances.

In its ideal form the diary is unexcelled as a continuous record of the subjective side of mental development. The first stirring of an interest, its growth, perhaps to the state of an absorbing passion, and its decline, can be traced. The turning points in a life are exposed to view, set, as they ought to be, in the everyday frame of unaccentuated routine. Long-term diaries provide the most remarkable of all sources for a study of continuities in personal development, the daily links being exposed in an unassuming and almost unconscious manner, and the epic itself unrolling year by year inexorably from childhood to maturity or beyond. But this picture of the theoretical perfection of the diary, we hasten to add,

is not often realized in practice. Few diaries turn out to be ideal. Indeed, one of the principal impressions we gain from surveying the extensive literature on this topic is that diaries are extoled to the skies for their potential merit, but suffer considerable discount when evaluated in terms of their actual scientific yield.

In contrast to the autobiography the diary is written under the immediate influence of experience, and for this reason is particularly effective in capturing changes of mood. In it inconsistencies of personality reveal themselves: broken entries prevent the spurious integration and simplification which autobiographies frequently impose upon a life; free association is permitted. Diaries do not show the anachronistic fallacy of attributing to earlier years thoughts, feelings, and interpretations appropriate only to the moment of writing; they likewise escape long-term errors of memory.[1]

Diary keeping is especially common in youth at the time when, conscious of his uniqueness and his solitude, the young person feels that adults no longer understand him, that some friend of his early years has failed him, or that moral conflicts have become almost unbearable. According to Uher's Russian study (182) two thirds of the adolescent girls and one third of the boys keep diaries. But according to Ponsonby and Trow (120), less than a quarter of the educated adults do so. An unpublished study in an eastern college indicates that 71 per cent of college girls had at some time kept diaries, but that only 36 per cent continued in the practice. Among 3500 Japanese students between the ages of 13 and 21 Yoda (194) found that one half of the college students kept diaries,

[1] These advantages of the diary form are set forth in more detail by Kupky (121), Stern (170), Debesse (59), and Ponsonby (148). Burr (43), on the other hand, has pointed out that lack of perspective in the diary is a disadvantage when compared with the increased sense of proportion that comes in reminiscent, autobiographical writing.

and a smaller percentage in the middle grades. The former entered chiefly intimate confessions of private affairs, the latter tended to write merely objective records of events.

Some diary keepers—especially the younger—are impersonal and methodical in their entries. They keep a log of the weather, sports, of school grades, of books read, or of travels. Though they thus preserve the events related to their egos, they fail to make clear in what way the ego is involved in these events. It is interesting to query the different motivations involved in the case of two diary writers of the same age, one of whom keeps a methodical inventory or log-book, the other a *journal intime*. The latter seems driven by introverted tensions, the former either by repressed narcissistic trends or by sheer methodical pedantry characteristic of some orderly, uncomplicated lives.

The confessional diary, the type of greatest interest to the psychologist, specializes in "personality-making" situations, but, like the autobiography, is prone to neglect the calm and happy periods of life so important for the stabilizing and socializing of personality. While spreading the emotions of distress or unusual elation upon his journal, the writer may not think to record the basic elements of security, trust, and happiness that knit his life to that of his family and community. That which does not pose a problem for him receives little mention. In health he does not write about his body; if happy with his family he takes the felicity for granted and seldom, if ever, refers to it. For this reason a confessional diary cannot be used as a complete revelation of personality without supplementary materials to help place its entries in true perspective.

Other limitations of the diary must be admitted. It is bound by the expressive ability of the writer, and—as Amiel points out—generally reflects but a negligible fraction of the ex-

periences worthy of record. Very often clichés and plagiarism creep into a diary, as do melodramatic expressions not at all representative of the ordinary conduct of the writer. Diaries have a way of interrupting their continuity; entries may be missing for months, and the impression therefore distorted. It is possible to pose in a diary, carrying out but one role of which the personality is capable. Secret or open plans for publication often enter into the pose, and a special type of attitude may be struck for the benefit of possible future readers. Further, the intimate journal takes much for granted, often failing to describe persons or situations whose existence and character the diarist merely *assumes*. And finally, the criticism most frequently emphasized in methodological writings pertains to the selected population that takes to diary writing. It is said to be the introverted individual or the one lacking normal satisfactions who most frequently keeps an intimate journal.[2]

BERNFELD AND PONSONBY

Bernfeld (23) shows that the *Tagebuch* is a traditional literary form reaching back into antiquity. His historical review, especially if taken together with Ponsonby's readable account of the history of English diaries, provides a good introduction to the study of diaries. Why a person should take to diary writing at all, and why he should adopt the elementary form (*Grundform*) that he does, Bernfeld regards as crucial questions at the outset of any analysis. According to him, the elementary forms of the diary are (1) the souvenir collection (*réliques*), (2) the subjective register (often a matter of moral bookkeeping), (3) letters (never to be mailed), (4)

[2] In spite of the frequency with which this last assertion is made, it seems somewhat unconvincing. If, as seems to be the case, half of the adolescents keep diaries, then the population involved is vast. Few other methods in psychology can sustain generalization on a wider scale.

aphorisms, (5) autobiography. Beginning with these elementary forms, according to Bernfeld, the writer usually comes to approach the standard or conventional form in time, a process that represents his desire to adapt to a norm. There are, however, a diversity of norms possible, and the model in the mind of the writer needs to be determined before the symbolic significance of his diary can be understood.

Ponsonby's approach, though that of a layman, is on the whole more valuable than Bernfeld's because it is freer from preconceptions. All kinds of people— sovereigns, tradesmen, philosophers, old women—Ponsonby points out, keep diaries. Most of the productions have human interest even if artistry is lacking and even if grammar goes with the winds. "All restraints can be lifted and in the open field of fact and fancy the diarist can browse, repose or gallop along at his own sweet will." The preserving and publishing of diaries raise problems in ethics and in science. Practically every diary writer has a horror of prying eyes and may be reluctant even to admit the keeping of a diary. No doubt the majority of diaries are destroyed by the writer or by his descendants although a few reach posterity and are made the basis of biography or scientific analysis. Biographers have a way of discarding the undignified little details, and the scientist tends to select in a way that oversimplifies the life. "No editor," concludes Ponsonby, "can be trusted not to spoil a diary."

Among motives in diary writing Ponsonby lists habit, "the itch to record," desire for methodical memoirs, self-dissection, penitence, relief from tension, self-pity. Egoism, of course, is always present; but this motive "does not carry us very far because most people are egotists, whether they are diary writers or not." There are, however, subtle forms of exhibitionism and vanity to reckon with, as for instance in those

cases that, having an eye to posterity, "are apt to make themselves out worse than they are so that by self-disparagement they may eventually get credit for being better than they seemed."

In his review of 120 English diaries, Ponsonby finds that religion occurs more frequently than other topics, no doubt because a diary "looks inward." An interesting sex difference is observed in the cautiousness of women writers, but likewise in their tendency to write voluminously if they write at all. This sex difference is worthy of further study.

Respecting the limitations of diaries, Ponsonby writes:

> We think we know ourselves better than others know us. But the truth is we know only the inside half, and it is doubtful whether any human being in varying moods can describe even that accurately.

Yet in estimating the validity of his 120 diaries he insists that "in every case a diary amplified what we know of its writer, if we know anything at all." Rarely, he contends, is the self revealed in the diary different from the self as otherwise known.[3]

CLASSIFICATION

No accepted scheme of classification for diaries has been offered. Bernfeld's *Grundformen* seems to lack utility. Although finer distinctions and subdivisions are possible, for the time being we shall list only three groups of diaries: (1) The *intimate journal,* (2) the *memoir,* and (3) the *log* (or inventory).

The *intimate journal* is by far the most interesting class of documents for the psychologist. Virtually everything said about diaries in the present chapter applies to this class alone. It contains uncensored outpourings, the entries being written discontinuously, either daily or at longer intervals of time.

[3] 148, p. 31

The *memoir* is an impersonal diary (illustrated by the records of foreign correspondents, for example, E. Taylor's *The Strategy of Terror,* or W. Shirer's *Berlin Diary).* A memoir may be written all in one sitting, so to speak, but nevertheless it manages to preserve an episodic character in the narration. Memoirs may tell little about the writer or his personal point of view. In proportion as they become impersonal they are likely to be of less interest to the psychologist and of greater interest to the historian or political scientist. A momentous memoir of the dimensions of *Mein Kampf* should be of interest to every social and psychological scientist.

The *log* is the account book, a weather record, a listing of arrivals, departures, reading, visiting, expenditures, illnesses. Occasionally such inventories, if they contain lists of sins (for instance, records of masturbation), or expenditures of time (time-budgets), become of value to the psychologist for certain restricted purposes. Likewise, the fact that the subject keeps methodical entries on any subject at all is one item of information that must take its place in a comprehensive study of his personality.

Like all other psychological research with personal documents, diary investigations can be said to fall into two classes: those that deal with two or more documents for the purpose of comparison and generalization (nomothetic purpose), and those that deal intensively with the single diary with a view to extracting its revelations concerning the single personality (idiographic purpose). As a matter of fact, what seems to happen in diary analysis as actually practiced is an unfortunate and inadmissible confusion of aims. The investigator often employs a *single* document and from it generalizes his findings to cover mental life at large. He does not use multiple documents as he should for the nomothetic purpose he has in mind, nor confine himself, as he might, to the struc-

ture and functioning of the single mind that lies exposed in the document before him.

COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF DIARIES

An interesting comparative analysis of diaries is that of Charlotte Bühler (40). On the basis of her acquaintance with 93 diaries in the Vienna collection she selected three that seemed representative of succeeding generations (girls born in different periods from 1873 to 1910). All alike were marked by a desire for intimate friends and love, as is generally the case with female diary writers. The eldest of the three reflected a culture in which dependence on family structure was paramount; the second, an introspectiveness and longing to be understood, characteristic of loosening family ties; the third, a distinctive self-assurance and independence. Although these characteristics do, as Bühler insists, seem typical of the eras from which the diaries are drawn, it is questionable whether individual personalities ever reflect perfectly the spirit of the times in which they live. The *Zeitgeist* is an abstraction from averages and need not find its typical representation in any single life. In any case, one diary cannot be taken as a basis for the reconstruction of the *Zeitgeist* of an era.

A second of Bühler's comparative studies (42) deals with two youthful diaries supplemented by considerable knowledge of the later careers of both writers. Although strikingly similar in adolescence, the following two decades produced great divergence. One of the writers seemed to fulfill literally all of the traits and tendencies of her adolescent years; the other changed markedly in social attitudes, sexual interests, and orientation to practical life.

A third of the Vienna studies illustrates an entirely different use for diary material, the study of language development. In a comparison of eleven diaries Fuchs (82) finds in

early adolescence simple descriptive exposition which in middle adolescence passes into subjective and egocentric description and later into an elaborately reflective language. Apart from Fuchs' study little scientific use has been made of the stylistic attributes of diary writing. Their spontaneity and freedom from corrections and editing, however, would seem to make them especially valuable for this purpose.

The problem of social distance during the adolescent age has been studied partly on the basis of diaries by Runner (158). To this author seven zones of social contact can be distinguished: the confidante, the intimate, the familiar, the acquaintance, the zone of active group participation, the zone of passive group membership, and the distant social world where spectatorship only is possible. Though it is questionable whether a study of personal documents alone could have yielded this neat classificatory scheme, there is no doubt they play a valuable role in investigations involving the problems of "life-space."

Two points emerge from this brief survey of comparative studies. First, we find them all dealing with the diaries of *adolescents,* partly no doubt because diaries at this age-level are more numerous and more easily obtained by investigators; but partly, too, because the subjective life of this age is rich and is more readily accessible in personal documents than in behavioral studies. Whatever the reason, *up to the present time research with diaries is almost entirely research in the psychology of adolescence.* The second point to record is that no one seems to have worried about the size of the sample required for nomothetic investigations based on diaries. Up to now the samples employed are very small, due, no doubt, to the difficulty of collecting an adequate supply of documents. In diary research it is obvious that the *customary standards of sampling are not in the slightest degree observed.*

Diaries of a middle-class Jewish boy from his twelfth through his fifteenth year were analyzed by Stern (170) from the "personalistic" point of view. This study is doubly interesting because the fact appears, through a thin disguise, that the youthful writer of the diaries and the mature expert analyst were one and the same person. He remarked that to the grownup author, the experiences of the boy appear partly to be the experiences of a stranger, partly those of an acquaintance, and partly those belonging properly to himself. This curious phenomenon of dissociation of experiences from the ego with the passage of time is familiar to all. Stern's discovery of the fact in relation to the *Tagebuch* suggests that careful analysis of early diaries in the presence of their authors might throw additional light upon this phenomenon.

In the case of Stern's *Tagebuch,* at the age of thirteen and a half the entries alter their character sharply. The sense of selfhood comes in abruptly to displace the earlier entries which reflected an orderly, conflictless, happy and purposeful childhood. The conflict between egotism and altruism becomes sharp, and the stresses of adolescence commence to appear.

To facilitate analysis and comment the author assorts the entries into topics: attitudes toward self, toward family, friends, girls; interest in art, science, politics and the like. The dominant purpose of the study is to show how in early adolescence the "personal significance" of experiences develops and changes. The author regards the work as a contribution to personalistic developmental psychology. It should be noted in this connection that *personalistic* does not mean *idiographic.* For Stern believes that the generalizations he draws are valid for all youth—at least for those given to diary-keeping.

On the basis of the *Tagebuch* Stern draws a sharp distinc-

tion between the sexual and the erotic in early adolescence. In this point he is strongly supported by the independent study of Iovetz-Tereschenko (99). This author opens his *Friendship-Love in Adolescence* with the contention that diaries *must* be employed for a psychological interpretation of the peculiarly sublime character of adolescent friendship. No other material available to the psychologist will suffice, least of all his personal recollections. Overlaid with later emotion (particularly with adult sexuality) the essentially non-sexual devotion of adolescence is rendered inaccessible to recall.

But to collect adolescent documents is not an easy matter, for in early adulthood these indiscreet records of the turbulent years are usually destroyed. Iovetz-Tereschenko advocates catching the documents during the late years of college, at a time when young people first become enthusiastic over scientific research.[4]

The specific material presented and analyzed by this author consists of intimate journals written by a Russian boy between the ages of 13 and 16, letters from the boy to his mother, and occasional supplementary material from the writings of other adolescents to reinforce the discussion. The author's analysis converges upon one central theme, a phenomenological definition of adolescent love which may be directed toward a child of the same sex or of the opposite sex; it is not sexual in nature but is a mental state "the characteristics of which are: an experience of happiness, of beatitude; an experience of 'a peculiar strange feeling,' a 'pleasant feeling,' 'in the breast'; an experience of this mental state being something of a sublime nature."[5]

[4] Iovetz-Tereschenko lists on pp. 14-17 of his book a number of collections of adolescent personal documents that have been made. Most of these were originally in the hands of German psychologists, and would be difficult to trace today.

[5] 99, p. 263

Although the entries presented are entirely compatible with this generalized hypothesis, they cannot be said to *establish* it. As is so frequently the case with interpretations based upon personal documents, many models will fit the facts. This is the problem which Blumer discovered to be central in the work of Thomas and Znaniecki, and is the problem to which Chapter 12 of this monograph is devoted.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of Iovetz-Tereschenko's book is its use of a diary in the *topical* manner. All attention is centered upon the phenomenology of early love. To be sure, the context of the life is given in part, but no other aspect of the boy's experience is allowed to hold the reader's interest.

An incidental weakness of this book is worth recording as a warning. Even though adolescent diaries may be relatively rare and even though they merit respectful editing, they are not worthy of the precious and meticulous exegesis conferred upon them by this author. The reader wants straightforward intelligibility, obtained through such circumspect editing as is necessary. He finds immensely irritating page upon page of such paleographical affectations as the following:

(I, 35) ". . . So when/we we [re] Peter [36] came to see me, /he . . .

Though based almost entirely on data from a single document neither this study nor that of Stern is, strictly speaking, idiographic. The authors are concerned primarily with the generalizations they draw, intended to hold for all adolescents (or at least for those who are given to diary keeping). It seems virtually impossible to cite a psychological study that uses a diary in a purely idiographic manner. A possible exception is a short note by Talbert (176) who comments on the structure of Amiel's personality in view of new evidence brought forth in the publication of *Philine*.

Surely the time is ripe for a detailed study of a diary from the point of view of the structure and functioning of an individual life. If the psychologist does not like the edited and self-conscious character of such published diaries as Bashkirtseff's (20), Barbellion's (17, 18), Ptaschkina's (152), he may easily obtain fresh and unadulterated material by putting forth a little effort.

In Chapter 1 we mentioned the diary most discussed in psychological circles, *A Young Girl's Diary* (195), famous because Freud, in a brief introductory letter, declared it to be a "gem." In it Freud saw the beginnings of sexual consciousness, its growth to the status of a dominant interest, and its final incorporation into a maturer stream of thought. Published originally by Hug-Helmuth with the assertion that it had not been edited or altered, various critics wrote attacks upon its authenticity.[6] The merits of this controversy do not seem worth recording. Suffice it to say that under strong pressure the publishers finally withdrew the book from circulation. Actually, the diary is simple and plausible enough, not in the least lurid, and seems in many respects similar to adolescent diaries whose authenticity is unquestionable. The style, however, does appear to be too mature for a young girl. The moral of this controversy, if it has a moral, would seem to be that editors of diaries should be entirely candid about modifications they have made for purposes of publication.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the fact that more has been written regarding the merits of the diary than regarding other single classes of personal documents, the present situation is far from satisfactory. In theory we may admit the virtues ascribed to this

[6] See for example, Krug (119).

quintessential human document. Especially for the adolescent years does it seem to be an indispensable and altogether irreplaceable source. But at the same time, in diary research as now practiced, we find the fallacy of generalizing from the single case. Usually one, or at most a handful of diaries, are taken into account by the nomothetic investigator who gains from them insights which he presents as general laws. In this field, we may say with literal accuracy, standards of sampling have never been observed. The situation would not be objectionable if psychologists had set for themselves the task of learning all that is possible from the document about one single life. But this legitimate idiographic goal is rarely represented in diary research.

It is not enough to publish excerpts from a diary, to talk pleasantly about them, and to mention the insights and hypotheses suggested to the editor (confusing these latter with the discovery of laws). Either the standards of nomothetic research or of idiographic research should be observed. In the future, we hope, better and more complete diaries, treated with a stricter regard for standards, will become available and help to realize for psychological science the unquestioned potential that lies in this class of personal documents.

LETTERS

Diaries, Ponsonby has said, have only one parent, whereas letters have two: the writer and the recipient. The use of letters in research, therefore, is complicated by the necessity of considering the personality of the recipient as well as that of the sender, the relationship existing between the two, and the topics of thought that comprise the exchange of letters. But complex though they may be, letters constitute a promising source to explore. If they are defective in revealing many sides of one personality, they are undoubtedly successful in

revealing the tie between two personalities. Dyadic relationships, tapped by letters, constitute a neglected chapter in social psychology.

One interesting study is Kahle's investigation of the family relations of 200 girl inmates in a protective institution (105). Incoming and outgoing letters were read and copied verbatim. Their analysis provided not only type-classifications for the kinds of relationships existing between girls and their families, but also showed in a striking manner the idealization of this relationship in periods of absence. An amusing contrast sometimes exists between the idyllic and sentimental letters written by a mother to an inmate daughter and the wrathful letters written to the institution after the girl's parole home demanding her immediate return to custody. This research contains the warning that both the artificialities of letter writing and the effects of distance between writer and recipient must be explored before correspondence can be taken as a true measure of the relationship.

In the analysis of letters the psychological and historical methods fuse. An example is found in Perry's reconstruction of the thought and character of William James (143) on the basis of the latter's extensive correspondence. In this research an accurate statement of events, relations, dates, is supplemented by a shrewd "clinical" account of James the man. It would be worth while for psychologists to try their hands at similar collections. Too often historians reconstruct the events represented in a *Briefwechsel,* but fail to reconstruct personalities involved.

Up to now psychologists have made far less use of letters than of diaries, no doubt because of the extraneous determinants that complicate the material. Were it not for the originality shown by Baldwin (16) we might grow pessimistic concerning the value of correspondence. In Chapter 2, however,

we related how this investigator applied intra-individual statistics to the frequencies of mental associations revealed in the letters of an elderly woman over a period of 11 years. When such original techniques as this suddenly appear in the tool house of psychology the outlook brightens.

Chapter 9

Artistic and Projective Documents

WE COME NOW to those forms of the personal document that might be called *unintentional.* In writing an autobiography, in answering a questionnaire, in taking part in an interview, in making a confession, or in writing a diary or a letter, the subject *knows* that he is giving out personal information. But in writing a composition or poem, in painting a picture, in responding to a projective test, he has little or no intention of revealing himself. That he does so is a matter of interest to the psychologist who likes to catch his subjects off guard. But for his part the subject thinks he is performing some objective task, and he is usually ignorant of the expressive and projective components that characterize his production.

PROBLEMS OF EXPRESSION AND PROJECTION

What an individual is voluntarily doing or saying constitutes the *adaptive* aspect of his behavior; *how* he is doing or saying it, the *expressive* aspect. Although the separation of these two aspects is difficult to maintain rigidly (for all behavior issues in a single final path), it is theoretically important to bear the distinction in mind. When a writer invents a story and with intention sets it down as a creation of his imagination, he is not fully aware of the fact that he is constrained by his own nature to tell it in a characteristic style which, even if he tries, he can vary only within narrow

limits. He expresses his thoughts crisply, metaphorically, impetuously, laboriously, whimsically, patiently, simply, elaborately, according to his nature. What is more, his personal experiences, complexes, prejudices, affect the content of his writings in ways more or less unknown to him. He not only *expresses* his traits (adverbially) but likewise *projects* them (substantively) into his productions. The total involuntary (expressive and projective) portion of his production constitutes an *unintentional personal document.*

The more rigid the requirements of an adaptive act in terms of skill and convention, the less freedom the individual has for expressive and stylistic performance. The sonnet form permits less individual variation than does vers libre; the exacting rules for a detective story leave little place for the intrusion of the author's fantasies; the voice of a radio announcer is standardized through training and reveals less of his personality than does the voice of an amateur. The relation between adaptive and expressive components in behavior has been treated more fully by Klages (112) and by G. W. Allport (8, Ch. 17). So far as personal documents are concerned, it must be borne in mind that *the more exacting the prescription in terms of task, the less value the document has in terms of expression or projection.*

The primary difference between the concept of *expression* and *projection* seems to lie in the nature of unconscious determinants of behavior which the investigator assumes. Expression stresses *manner* of performance; projection rather more the *content* that is produced. The psychologist interested in expression may seem to disregard the possibility of a well-structured unconscious mind, replete with Freudian ideas and dynamic symbolism. He thinks of the unconscious determinants in terms of temperament, regional and racial conventions, personal traits, mood, age, condition of health and

disease, special habits arising from special training, and peculiarities of build and constitution. The user of projective methods, on the other hand, feels certain that infantile wishes, subconscious thought-forms, buried conflicts, are the major determinants of creation. But both "expressionists" and "projectionists" work with the same materials, and in many cases overlap in their interpretations. It is not necessary, therefore, to distinguish further between these approaches. In the sections that follow the reader can spot for himself investigations that lean toward the expressionist or the projectionist mode of interpretation.

LITERARY CREATIONS

As pointed out in Chapter 3, the works of prose writers, poets, dramatists, have often been studied by psychologists and psychiatrists for the purpose of reconstructing an author's personality. A fairly mechanical technique for studying style in terms of sentence length, paragraph structure, length of words, has been proposed by Rickert (155), but as yet no one has established an invariant relation between any one stylistic feature and a corresponding attribute of personality, although it is possible, for example, that indecisive people may employ more subjunctives in their speech. At the opposite extreme (where most psychologists cluster) we find the investigator plunging at once into the author's unconscious life and pointing to autobiographical elements in a *Peer Gynt* (102) or a *Fall of the House of Usher* (32). The more objective the analysis of style, the less significant does it seem to be. When significance exists we are confronted with the still obscure process of clinical diagnosis.

The psychoanalytic argument for the use of literature as a species of personal document is based on the simple argument that *literature is the author's fantasy, and as a man fantasies—*

so is he. But, as McCurdy (132) makes clear, the chief obstacle to interpretation lies in the fact that the author of a literary work is not available for free association, with the result that the meaning of his fantasies is by no means clear. Nevertheless, the interpretation of personality on the basis of literary production has gone far, and as literature and psychology become better acquainted with each other, will go further. The confluence of these two fields of investigation is a problem far too extensive for our present review, and has been considered elsewhere (7).

COMPOSITIONS

The analysis of students' themes and essays is a common practice among psychologists. The suggestive title "I" was assigned to several hundred Japanese high school students by Sakurai and Chiba (159); MacKaye (129) reports good results with such revealing titles as "My Favorite Day-Dream," and "The Dream That Bothers Me Most." Other common topics are "What Hero I Should Like to Resemble," "My Personal Ambitions," or simply, "My Autobiography." In spite of the large amount of stilted and conventional production called forth by this assignment, the results are almost always instructive. Indeed, the very fact that one writer takes the assignment as an invitation for confession and another handles it with reticence or antagonism is symptomatic. Topics need not be worded in a personal manner, nor need the subject write about himself at all. There is value in almost any composition from the point of view of the psychology of expression and projection.

A notable study of the consistency of stylistic expression is that of F. H. Allport, L. Walker, and E. Lathers (5). Nine themes were gathered from each of 70 college students at different times of the year. The topics were prescribed and

uniform. After the themes had been copied on a typewriter, with names deleted, different judges attempted to group the themes written by the same student, judging on the basis of style alone. The results were clearly positive. Occasionally, to be sure, some striking mechanical feature caught the eye and aided in identification. For instance, addiction to semicolons would mark the writing, or some oddity of punctuation or spelling. But most matchings were made on the basis of personal traits of the writer reflected in all his productions. One, for example, showed "a feeling for atmosphere; a well-balanced sense of humor, a quiet, amused tolerance of social relations"; another was "constantly bored, looking at life as a monotonous experience in which one follows the easiest course of action." With this demonstration of consistency at hand it is possible to proceed with greater confidence to employ compositions for research purposes even when only a single specimen is available for analysis.

The uses to which compositions may be put are both nomothetic and idiographic. Of the former type, we have generalizations from themes regarding the ego-ideals or heros of young people, regarding their use of language at various ages (108), their feelings of selfhood (159), and other psychological functions. From the idiographic point of view we have MacKaye's (129) and Blos's (28) demonstration of the remarkable clinical value of compositions. The latter author writes:

> Through the psychological character of any creation we are apt to get closer to the intimate structure of the personality than we could from observational data alone. Personal feelings and sensations, wishful thinking, deprivation and disappointment, indirectly find a legitimate outlet in creative writing, whether it be prose or poetry.[1]

In one of his cases Blos shows how the compositions of a fourteen-year-old boy, Paul, betray many personal traits and interests: the boy's argumentativeness and aggressiveness, his

[1] 28, p. 17

mediocre imaginativeness and stylistic artificiality, his concern for economic security, as well as his ability to fight off minor illnesses and disappointments, and finally his interest in politics, music, mathematics, and war. The fact that these qualities are verified by teachers' estimates and by home investigation and interview establishes the validity of the diagnosis based on compositions. If we may take the study of Allport, Walker, and Lathers as establishing the *reliability* of compositions, and the study by Blos as establishing their *validity,* we may say that the use of such documents by clinicians is, in principle, justified.

ART FORMS

The style of a painter or sculptor is a signature of his personality. Even in portraiture where the external constraints are high, the expressive aspect of the product is unmistakable. Occasionally attempts have been made to characterize the mental life of an artist from his style. To give but a single example, Kris (116) describes the paranoid condition of the Viennese baroque sculptor Messerschmidt on the basis of a study of 27 examples of his curiously distorted busts. Kris, however, hastens to add confirmatory evidence from letters and reports by Messerschmidt's acquaintances. He conducts his analysis entirely within the framework of psychoanalysis, and once again illustrates the stimulating influence of this system of thought upon historical research and criticism.

It is primarily the abnormal components in style that interest psychological analysts. The poetry of schizophrenics (110), or the pictures and drawings of various classes of psychotics (151) have special appeal. Studies of this type have led several investigators, Werner (189) among them, to draw prominent parallels between the thought-life of children,

psychotics, and primitive man, a notable amount of syncretism characterizing the artistic productions of all three groups.

Yet, on the whole, the study of artistic productions, musical style, drawings, has engaged psychologists far less than the study of literature and other linguistic productions. Techniques of analysis are lacking, and little attention is paid to questions of adequacy of sample, validity, or reliability. But growing interest in this field of study as part of the larger psychological problem of expressive behavior may be expected.

PROJECTIVE METHODS

When projective techniques reach the stage of standardized or semi-standardized tests (for example, the Rorschach test), they leave the realm of personal documents altogether. But there are other instances where projective methods are used for spontaneous, free-flowing self-revelation, and in these cases the resulting oral report (which may be recorded in permanent fashion) constitutes a personal document in the same sense as does a recorded psychoanalysis or interview.

For young children from 5 to 10 years of age Thomas (180) advocates the use of story-completion which generally seems to invite the child to continue a narrative started for him in terms of his own personal experiences and conflicts. For older subjects the interpretation of pictures is the method most commonly employed. The most extensive use of projective methods is represented in the research of the Harvard Psychological Clinic (139). A discussion of the method is contained in a paper by Frank (73).

Projective methods invite the subject to perform what to him seems merely an objective task: to interpret faint and almost inaudible speech that he hears from a phonograph record, to tell what reveries musical compositions arouse in

him, what associations odors bring to mind, how he would complete a simile ("as unhappy as . . ."), or, more often, to interpret a picture that depicts a person of the same sex and about the same age as the subject in some dramatic situation. In this latter task the investigator's assumption is that the subject will reveal his own personality by identifying himself with the character in the picture and by projecting his own nature into this character. This technique is a joint product of Freudian theories of the unconscious and an American zeal to objectify the subject's fantasies and free associations.

It seems likely that the projective, or, as they are sometimes called, thematic, methods will continue to increase in popularity. Work is now under way attempting to standardize the use of pictures. But a serious weakness remains: how are we to tell that the subject is really projecting his own nature into the product? Does every invention or act of creation betray the state of the inventor's personal unconscious, or may his associational processes be determined by more objective considerations? Occasionally, the internal consistency of the product with other available data concerning the subject is offered as proof of the validity of the technique; but in many cases the subject's performance is held to be a prima facie revelation of his unconscious, when as a matter of fact, the subject may be creating an aesthetic and imaginative product entirely unrelated to the deeper strata of his personality. As with all other unintentional documents the investigator must make doubly sure that the documents are truly *personal* and not a production of unfettered artistic imagination.

AUTOMATIC WRITING

Morton Prince, presenting his case of Sally Beauchamp in 1906 (150), included a 30-page autobiography obtained from

the "secondary self" by means of automatic writing. In 1900 Flournoy (72) had already published results obtained by the same method in his investigation of the genesis of a trance personality. Two decades later Mühl (136) expressed enthusiasm for the same method, stressing especially its usefulness in normal subjects as well as with hysterics. With practice almost anyone can learn through automatic writing to tap his own unconscious mental life. The result, according to Mühl, gives unexpected evidence concerning the origin of the subject's fears, obsessions, delusions—revealing forgotten childhood incidents as well as suppressed conflicts, and even on occasion disclosing latent talents and genius.

On the whole, however, the revelations of automatic writing are of much less interest to psychologists than they were at the turn of the century. Experience shows that the technique does not pave a highway into the naked unconscious. That it may, on occasion, be a valuable ancillary method cannot be denied, and though it is now out of fashion, we may expect that it will one day be revived and tested more rigidly for its potential value in the production of personal documents.

VARIOUS

Just where to draw the line in our list of personal documents is not easy to determine. We might go on to include time-budgets, those records kept by the subject of his daily activities and of the amount of time devoted to each. Strang (173) has pointed out that such documents are remarkably objective and serve as a control in interpreting more subjective reports. We might include records of spontaneous dramatic performances of the type obtained by Moreno (135), who, for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes, asks his patients to act out either scenes of real life in which they recently

have taken part or else to make up little plays of their own (projection method). Moreno insists that "the spontaneous character of psychodramatics makes it hard, almost impossible, for the actor to keep his private ego out of the role." For this reason we have in such psychodramatic records a subjective account of the patient's reaction to what for him is a significant life situation.

We might include, likewise, *memorabilia, scrap-books,* and *collections.* A person may keep a notebook wherein are treasured aphorisms, epigrams, pen sketches. He may also keep a small museum around himself, choosing objects (ornaments, clothes, books, pictures, theater programs, stuffed animals, postage stamps, period furniture) that reveal his configuration of interests. Stern (171) has proposed that psychologists collect from various individuals many-sided samples of their interests and activities: drawings, poems, diaries, compositions, modeling and handiwork. "The more free and spontaneous the productions," he writes, "the clearer is the psychological language that they speak." From such *Sammlungen,* the many-sided expressions of the single personality could be studied, pieced together, and finally made to contribute to a fully rounded study of the individual.

At this point the meaning of *personal document* becomes dangerously extended. Yet it is necessary to realize that expression and projection are problems that can be studied in records of behavior other than self-writing. Expressive movement and projective activity are new chapters in psychological science.[2] When they are more fully developed they will play an important part in revealing new diagnostic cues that now lie hidden in both intentional and unintentional personal documents.

[2] An initial attempt to catalogue the numerous fields of expressive movement accessible to psychological study has been made by G. W. Allport and P. E. Vernon (13).

THE COMBINING OF METHODS

We have completed our review of the forms in which personal documents are utilized in psychological research. But no one cares particularly whether or not he employs one form alone or many forms together in the same investigation; and, for that matter, no one cares especially whether he mixes personal documents with other methods of research. In practice we find various techniques intermingled, with personal documents often playing only an incidental role. Lasswell (122) has pointed out that social science has been moving toward the intensive study of the individual's account of himself. The best focus for this account, this author believes, is the "prolonged interview" which combines all manner of techniques: observation, introspective reports, testing, questionnaires, physiological measures, and what not. The maximum of trustworthy information is the desideratum; the purity of any single method in the battery does not matter.

In favor of such synthesis as Lasswell advocates is the fact that findings by one method reinforce and validate findings by another. Indeed, the internal consistency, or self-confrontation, of evidence obtained by such polydimensional approaches is almost the only test we have for the validity of our researches. So by all means let personal documents fall into a larger battery of methods.

For the present, however, we are interested in the simon-pure personal document as a methodological problem by itself. Our task is to evaluate it in isolation in order to establish its right to play any part at all in scientific investigation, either singly or in combination with other techniques of research. To the problem of evaluation we now turn our attention.

Part III

The Value of Personal Documents

Chapter 10

The Case Against Personal Documents

MANY CRITICISMS have been raised against the use of personal documents. Some of these we shall find to be well-grounded, others to be irrelevant or trivial, and still others to be contingent upon the type of document employed and the kind of use to which it is put.

UNREPRESENTATIVENESS OF SAMPLE

In personal documents only a minority of people ever undertake to tell about their mental processes or their personalities. Diary writers, it is true, are numerous during adolescent years, but not many make their documents available. Therefore, it is said, generalization on the basis of personal writing is limited to the kind of people who prepare accessible documents. Murphy, Murphy, and Newcomb (138) have held that these are likely to be people suffering frustrated emotional lives and particularly inclined to "talk out" their problems on paper.

To counteract this selectivity of sample it has been proposed that the cooperation of a more representative cross section be solicited. With tactful coercion, for example, students in a classroom can be induced to keep records or to write autobiographies. It is known likewise that financial incentives plus the promise of anonymity will elicit documents from large numbers of otherwise reluctant people. To a certain extent, therefore, an enterprising investigator can overcome the limitation of the selectivity of sample.

It should be noted that this criticism is relevant only within the nomothetic frame of reference. Interest in a single life for the purpose of finding out how *one* human life is structured and how it functions demands only *one* valid document. The thoughts and feelings of Scott, the explorer who died in the Antarctic, are recorded in his Journal. It does not lose its value because it is an atypical document, comparable to none on earth. No one wants to take the nomothetic view of Scott's Journal; nor *need* one take this view of *any* personal document whatsoever.

FASCINATION WITH STYLE

Gruhle (84) has objected that first-person documents give information only about people who are talented in writing. Even delinquents and immigrants can give us their records only if they are literate and inclined to express themselves in the written word. Extending this criticism, Gruhle objects that any writer is likely to develop an aesthetic fascination with his task, to turn out phrases that please him, allowing art to take precedence over sincerity and fact. A subtler consideration is that since certain artifices are employed by one writer and not by another, since what may be hyperbole for one is understatement for another, we cannot know when we read one document whether it is permissible to compare it with another. These various objections might perhaps be summed up by saying that words are inferior *operations* and that therefore personal documents are inferior data: noncomparable, nontestable, nonpublic. Let us consider this point along with the next criticism.

NONOBJECTIVITY

By definition personal documents are subjective data. As such, they are out of line with the prevailing American scientific temper. Just as the psychiatrist knows that the

patient's "own story" of his or her difficulties cannot be accepted as a wholly valid statement of the real problem, so too, psychologists know that the factual situation is not fully available to his subject.

The demand for objectivity in psychology followed the discovery of the inadequacies of introspection, yet it is evident that the personal document represents a return to a species of introspection. That there is a cycle involved here is shown by Lasswell (122) who points out correctly that the recent surge of interest in life documents is, in part, a protest against the laboratory emphasis and against the aridity of behaviorism. To a certain degree, therefore, enthusiasm for the personal document is deliberately an act of scientific irreverence.

Since personal documents are, and always will be, completely subjective, there is no way of convincing the bitter-end objectivist that he should employ them. His demands for observer-reliability and public availability of the operations involved are not possible to meet. No two observers can be led to agree upon the experience and feelings reported, for there is only one observer involved. From the point of view of the objectivist, therefore, there is little case to be made for their use.

Two replies are in order: (1) Extreme objectivism has disclosed its own weakness. The resurgence of phenomenology has brought back to favor the personal report. (2) The conflict is not so irreconcilable as it appears. Users of the personal document have learned many lessons from behaviorism and positivism. They are aware that the document does not need to stand alone, that supporting evidence can and should be obtained, that experimentation relating to form and circumstances of writing may enhance the validity of the product, and that impulsive interpretations are not lightly to be made.

The personal document, we conclude, can be made to satisfy reasonable standards of objectivity, even though it will never appeal to scientists who embrace extreme operationism.

VALIDITY CANNOT BE ESTIMATED

This objection is somewhat out of date. Recent investigations have established genuine measures of validity. The investigations of Stouffer (172) and Cavan, Hauser, and Stouffer (50) have already been mentioned in this connection. To this list we might add Stagner's experiment (168) wherein the results of clinical interviews and independently rated autobiographies were compared in respect to the subjects' emotional stability. Correlations ranging from .80 to .87 were obtained. Such studies as these show that investigators are aware of the need for validating the personal document, and that already promising results have been obtained.

It is true that quantitative measures of validity cannot always be used. How, for example, can we know that Admiral Byrd in *Alone* reports accurately his solitary experiences at 80 degrees South Latitude during a long winter? In such documents as this other tests of validity must be sought.

Nonquantitative indications of validity are three in number. (1) As in everyday life the general honesty and credibility of the report can be relied upon; this is the ad hominem test. (2) The *plausibility* of the document in terms of our own past experiences, as they are relevant, can be considered; even if our past experience is meager we know something of the range of human potentialities by which we can judge the probable truth of an account. (3) The test of internal consistency or *self-confrontation* has to be widely relied upon. A document that hangs together, that represents a structured configuration of human life and harbors no impossible contradictions has at least a prima facie validity. This is the only

test ordinarily applied to literature and biography (7). Though not a sufficient test for science, it none the less has its part to play.

When these three tests are admitted in addition to correlational and other statistical checks, the chances for validating personal documents definitely brighten. It may be pointed out that all tests of validity are mere conventions, and that the prevailing fashion in statistical measures is not an exception to this rule.

Let us consider a concrete case where statistical measures are inapplicable, and yet an unquestionable validity is present. Dda (58) tells how it feels to suffer from parathyroid deficiency, following a subtotal thyroidectomy. The story covers a period of five years until the time calcium treatment finally restored her to normal emotional and cognitive equilibrium. The document seems utterly convincing even though objective validation is not possible, and even though, in this case, the reader has virtually no personal experience upon which he can call. Why is it convincing? In the first place, the *self-confrontation* is perfect; the story, bizarre though it is, is consequent and unified. In the second place, the attendant physician adds a supporting statement: "The psychological and emotional changes can best be described by the patient herself, and I can only say that our objective observations seemed to be consistent with the changes described by the patient." Finally, though it appears scarcely necessary, the matter is clinched by a second report from another patient which, in all major details, supports the first. If any doubts existed concerning the cause-effect relationship, the addition of the second report eliminates them.[1] Here, by three devices,

[1] From the nomothetic point of view it is important to note that the more *unusual* the symptom, the *smaller* the number of cases required to discern satisfactorily a causal relationship. This fact greatly complicates the question as to how large a sample is needed to justify nomothetic generalizations.

the validity of a subjective report in all its major features is established beyond shadow of doubt. Personal documents, we conclude, even when statistics cannot be employed, can, nevertheless, be valid documents.

DECEPTION

Specious statements within personal documents range in type from unconscious rationalizations to deliberate hoaxes. As a safeguard against intentional deceptions, we may invoke the tests of validity mentioned above. Having done so, the psychologist can then shy away from material whose validity he suspects, unless, of course, he wishes to examine it *as* a questionable document. With so many honest and valuable records available it is unnecessary to waste time over those that are suspected. The story is told that school boys delighted in fabricating lurid sexual autobiographies for Krafft-Ebing who innocently published them in his books. This charge may not be true, but it indicates the need for investigators to maintain a check on the source of their documents. It would seem possible in every instance to demand *some* independent proof that the subject himself underwent the experiences recorded. If independent evidence can be secured on at least a few points in the document, then the remainder gains in credibility.

The motives in deception are complex. Perverse exhibitionism is not uncommon. The implicit reasoning seems to be, "Am I not wonderful because I see so many defects and blemishes in my character?" To find oneself so altogether blameworthy is as suspicious as to find oneself altogether blameless. Furthermore, in self-excoriating documents it is often true that some secrets are deliberately hidden. In his *Adepts in Self-Portraiture,* Stefan Zweig has pointed out how every individual has been guilty of small meannesses and

humiliating stupidities that he will hide even though he freely confesses grosser sins. In a sense, one may be proud of one's sins, or at least of confessing them, but there are still humiliating blemishes that one may not expose to view.

The strict guarantee of anonymity, if it can be given, is perhaps the best preventive of deliberate deception. Helpful too is preliminary instruction in the course of which the subject is encouraged to avoid moral evaluations in reporting his life. An objective task-attitude makes a difference in the quality of documents secured. Whereas moral evaluation leads to deliberate self-justification, the scientific attitude, supported by anonymity, reduces deception to a minimum.

SELF-DECEPTION

There will remain, however, the problem of *unintentional* self-justification. What the beloved ego may produce in the way of unconscious rationalizations is a familiar story to psychologists. The problem is far too subtle to be treated adequately in this short discussion. If we looked into the matter, we might question whether any mortal can ever free himself from a feeling of fundamental rightness in his conduct. Peripheral evils and errors he can put into perspective and report accurately; but the pivots upon which the whole life turns are sacred. To expose them to ridicule or to deny their fundamental rightness would be to devastate the very foundations of his life. Therefore, he must consider his own course as justified, and his own ego in the last analysis as inviolable. Suicide would be the only alternative. This deeper stirring of self-regard seems to be the eternal thread found in all personal documents. The fact that it leads to self-deception or that it *is* self-deception may be admitted.

But, looking at the matter another way, a personal document is one person's view of life. A person is a self-regarding

focus of value. What we *want* to know is what life does look like from this focus of value. Every self regards itself as sacred, and a document produced from precisely this point of view is exactly what we desire. If we wished an "objective" interpretation of a life we would use the cases written by psychiatrists or psychoanalysts. There would be no justification at all for personal documents unless we wanted to know the workings of the ego from the ego's partisan standpoint.

Granted that we want documents that are essentially biased in terms of ego-values, we may still be interested in the *insight* of the subject. Does he report correctly the workings of his ego? Is he capable of seeing himself as others see him whether or not he agrees with the public verdict? In this specific sense of self-deception psychologists have a deep interest. In Chapter 2 we pointed out that Frenkel-Brunswik (75) concluded on the basis of an experimental study that self-deception in reporting may be suspected when a subject employs repetition, superlatives, and marked emphasis. Protesting too much would seem to indicate, as Shakespeare said, the presence of true guilt. If Frenkel-Brunswik's work is extended, it may not be too much to hope that psychologists will one day produce a "Guide to Rationalizations and Projections" to assist users of personal documents in discovering those passages in which the narrator is, in the narrow and specific sense of the term, deceiving himself.

BLINDNESS TO MOTIVES

It is exceedingly difficult for men to report adequately their own motives, and this is true whether or not the mechanism of self-justification is at work. To some extent the lapse of time that occurs between the completion of an act and its recording is responsible; here the influence of retrospect may be disastrous. A person of fifty in writing of himself at nine-

teen may ascribe motives to his conduct that are, in reality, only appropriate to him at the time of writing. Recovering the emotional storm and stress of adolescence, as students of the diary have pointed out, is something an adult can rarely do. Another error is found in documents that say in effect, "I used to be hampered by such a vice; but I am no longer." Wishful thinking helps the process of believing that earlier defects are definitely overcome when in truth they linger on.

Healy (91) has complained that even the classics of autobiography fail to tell what the modern scientific inquirer wants to know. Some of the building blocks in personality known to psychiatrists and psychologists are unrecognized by most autobiographers. This objection leads to the thoroughgoing psychoanalytic position which holds that certain crucial motives are essentially unconscious and because of the force of repression are bound to remain so (except by grace of psychoanalysis). It follows that only the autobiographies of the analyzed can be clear-eyed and enlightening to science.[2]

Writers know well enough what their *intentions* are, and what their *proximate* motives are, but seem lost when it comes to reporting "ultimate" motives. But before regarding this as a fatal criticism let us raise the question whether any psychological scientist knows the nature of anyone's *ultimate* motives. Apart from psychoanalysts who are most self-confident in the matter, very few psychologists care to diagnose ultimate motivation in any particular case. Therefore, before we repudiate the personal document as inadequate in respect

[2] Working on this assumption, the editor of the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* recently invited a dozen psychologists who had been analyzed to contribute as personal a document as they wished to a symposium entitled, "Psychoanalysis as Seen by Analyzed Psychologists." Some of the documents were entirely personal in character; others, partly so. But whether the results were superior to those obtained from other documents (written without the benefit of psychoanalysis), the reader of the symposium will have to decide for himself. See contributions to this Journal, 1940, Vol. 35, Nos. 1, 2 and 3.

to motive-reporting let us wait until the psychologist can demonstrate his own superiority over the autobiographer.

Another theoretical point of importance is involved, the same to which attention was called in Chapter 7. Some psychologists question whether essential motives are as hidden from consciousness and as inaccessible to report as psychoanalysts aver. Since whatever drives the individual must drive him *now,* and since original motives may be transformed into new and contemporaneous systems, there is reason to believe that the emphasis upon early life, upon childhood fixations, may have gone too far. In settling this dispute we may employ personal documents with great profit, for in them essential data are presented without which the picture of motivation would most certainly be incomplete.

Our conclusion is that although no writer can see the whole of his own motivational pattern he probably sees enough of it to make his report valuable to the psychologist. Particularly at the present stage of development psychological science can gain immeasurably from closer scrutiny of the subject's own story of reasons for his conduct.

OVERSIMPLIFICATION

The writer of a personal document does not want unsolved riddles, visible gaps, unexplained conduct. His desire for completeness leads him to fill in unknown parts in a manner that fabricates a satisfying closure. The Germans speak of *Gestaltdrang* and of *Motivbedürfnis* in this connection. Then, in response to his drive for consistency the writer may soften the contradictions, join together the incompatible features of his life, and produce a shipshape structure in which all parts fit. This tendency is more marked in the autobiography than in the diary, the former almost invariably showing greater unity of purpose and definiteness of direction than the latter.

Although this criticism is justified, we are bound to point out that third-person documents likewise oversimplify, and that laboratory and field investigations do the same thing. It would be well to devise some experimental study on this point, discovering, for example, what happens to a diary when the author is asked to turn it into an autobiography; or what differences exist between a person's account of his behavior during a single day and an objective record of that behavior.

EFFECTS OF MOOD (UNRELIABILITY)

Letters, entries in diaries, and sometimes also autobiographies are heavily saturated with mood. In some people moods change markedly from time to time, and for this reason a document produced under the influence of one mood does not represent the continuing nature of the individual.

Actually this criticism is not serious, for scarcely any document is produced at one sitting. No trained psychologist would be guilty of using a single diary entry or a single letter as a diagnostic basis; and autobiographies take several sittings to write. So long as the composition is spread over a period of time, the effects of moods may be expected to counterbalance one another and to result in a fairly accurate picture of the prevailing temperament. Furthermore, we may say that investigators seem sufficiently aware of this pitfall, and can be trusted to insist upon a reliable sample of the subject's productions before using them for diagnostic or for research purposes.

ERRORS OF MEMORY

Although errors in memory may be motivated by a desire to deceive the reader or by an unconscious wish to deceive oneself, there are also changes and losses in ordinary memory "traces" that must be taken into account. The past congeals

into firmly set mnemonic forms. One thinks of one's childhood as unhappy or idyllic, or uneventful, and with this leading motif in mind, specific images, events, and even certain contrasting experiences that relieved the monotony, are selected for retention. The rest may be forgotten. Autobiographies are more liable to this error than are diaries, but diaries do not begin to be revealing until the age of puberty, and by this time errors of memory may already creep in.

Even though errors of this sort are common, they are not especially troublesome, for the very fact that the subject structures and recalls his life in a certain manner is what we want to know. Furthermore, it is unlikely (barring repression) that individuals will forget the emotional, ego-charged, personality-forming experiences in their lives. Inaccurate as testimony often is in respect to detail, the memory for salient facts, for atmosphere, and for experiences most closely related to the self is trustworthy.

In order that events do not temporarily slip the mind while writing, the subject can have recourse to the questionnaire-guides mentioned in Chapter 7 or to consultations with the psychologist. Occasionally long periods of preparation are found, as in the case of Leonard's autobiography, though the actual time taken in writing may be short. It was his period of preparation for writing that gave Leonard confidence to assert (in a personal communication) that in respect to external and internal detail his was "the most accurate autobiography ever written." Preparation seems at least to enhance subjective certainty. Probably it enhances accuracy in respect to detail as well.

IMPLICIT CONCEPTUALIZATION

The production of a personal document requires selection of materials. Selection brings with it implicit interpretation.

To state some thoughts and feelings and not others, limits the interpretation at the outset. What is worse, this selection may take place because the writer has his own diagnostic biases. He may be a convinced Adlerian, Freudian, or Christian Scientist. Or he may want to please the investigator, and knowing the investigator's scientific biases, he may frame his statements accordingly. Furthermore, the very act of dividing a document into sections or planning it in outline suggests divisions in the life that are artificial. Its continuous flow cannot be represented by subdivisions, nor can its interrelatedness be shown by topical organization. So, whichever way we look, we find implicit interpretation imposed upon the document in the very act of writing.

Whenever for the purposes of nomothetic science comparable documents are sought, with uniform headings and prescribed content, this implicit conceptualization may be especially dangerous. Prescribed forms mean that every case is forced into the same mold. And when, at the conclusion of his study, the investigator "discovers" that his mold fits all cases, he is guilty of nomothetic prestidigitation. A case in point comes to mind. In one study the investigator secured fifty topical autobiographies, forcing all writers to tell about radicalism and conservatism in their lives. Having forced his cases into this mold, the investigator was tempted to "discover" that each case could be rated on the radical-conservative continuum according to his self-revealed nature; this suggested to him further that radicalism-conservatism constitutes one of those first-order variables of which all personalities are compounded. But the circularity of this reasoning became evident in time to save him. A closer reading of the fifty documents convinced him that in most lives the concept of radicalism-conservatism was wholly irrelevant. The lives were organized according to *other* principles, and the

foci or centers of organization were different in each life.

But it is not only in nomothetic research that card-stacking may occur. Predetermined selection and arrangement leading to only one result in conceptualization may be met in idiographic research as well. There seems to be no complete cure for this error, for obviously, *some* order has to be placed on the welter of material that constitutes a personal life and *any* order implies some interpretation.

There is no satisfactory answer to this dilemma. It helps but little to point out that all other methods of research are constrained by preconceptions, by selection of episode, by the prearranged setting of the research. Possibly, personal documents may be said to suffer less in that ordinarily the subject himself chooses his form of writing, and in so doing makes the implicit conceptualization most suitable to his case. But to secure this advantage it is necessary that he be encouraged to disregard such psychological preconceptions as he may have and to take lightly the prescriptions of the investigator's questionnaire-guide.

ARBITRARINESS OF CONCEPTUALIZATION

We are indebted to Blumer for making clear in connection with the research of Thomas and Znaniecki that personal documents may take their meaning from the authors' conceptual framework rather than supply its basis. Many times in reading an interpreted case we feel that a totally different conceptualization would fit the raw data as well as that given by the investigator. In terms of the continuum of *induction-illustration* discussed in Chapter 3, the entries seem skewed. Illustration is more common than induction, although often, as Blumer finds, a strange mixture of induction and illustration exists.

The author of the personal document first limits himself to data he thinks important (implicit conceptualization),

then the investigator or commenter further limits the picture by emphasizing the facts that seem important to him, and on top of this selection formulates his statements of cause and effect, his theory of structure, and his prognosis. The whole process invites the riding of hobbies, the imposition of predetermined conclusions and a drift away from inductive science.

Arbitrariness is especially apparent when the interpretation is given on the basis of manifestly meager data. But even when the materials are plentiful, however, there seems no way of insuring that only compulsory interpretations will be drawn. Of course, resorting again to a *tu quoque,* we may point out that psychologists notoriously interpret even experimental facts according to different theories (of learning, of motivation, of the unconscious). That personal documents actually are any worse off at the hands of psychologists than are other forms of raw data seems doubtful.

SCARCITY AND EXPENSE

Some writers have complained that no body of personal documents is available for psychologists to consult in the course of their training and research. Just why no such archive is available, and no published collections at hand, is hard to explain. Certain German psychologists, notably in Vienna and Hamburg, began collections, but were interrupted in the process by political disaster. There is a genuine need for systematic collections of anonymous documents, intelligently indexed, and available to students and investigators. A published series of diaries, personal letters, autobiographies, would have even wider possibilities for use.

The expense of the case study method has been commented on by Lazarsfeld, who, in his introduction to Komarovsky's study (113), points out that because of their expense the use of documents may best lie in the analysis of excep-

tions to general trends first ascertained by crude statistical procedures. In other words, the life document comes into its own whenever we find (in nomothetic research) that certain cases fail to fit the generalization that is made on other evidence. From this point of view, documents are an exceptional method, to be employed only when other methods fail. But this solution overlooks the many uses to which psychologists can put personal documents, other than nomothetic research.

PERSONAL DOCUMENTS NOT SCIENCE

Again and again we meet the biased and superficial objection that personal documents are not, and cannot be, scientifically employed because they deal with single cases. The view is that the document may serve as a *first* step for a scientist in informing him of problems and points worthy of investigation; but from that point on, statistical methods must prevail. This objection, as shown in Chapter 4, is based upon a narrowly conventional view of what scientific method must be. Whatever contributes to a knowledge of human nature, is an admissible method to science. That personal documents contribute far more than initial hunches (which later must be statistically verified) will be shown in the next chapter.

SUMMARY

The criticisms we have reviewed fall into three groups: those that are irrelevant, trivial or false; those that are true under certain conditions or in a limited sense; and those that are generally true and admittedly serious.

In the first group we place charges that personal documents by their very nature are nonobjective, nonvalid, and nonreliable. Of course they are nonobjective, but nevertheless they are frequently shown to be valid. Criteria of validity may

involve statistical techniques (for example, correlations derived from the rating of autobiographical data and independent sources); or may involve tests of internal consistency (self-confrontation), of plausibility (agreement with reader's experience), of known reliability of the writer, or of nonquantitative independent evidence. The charge of nonreliability has no particular meaning unless it be in terms of the effects of mood—a danger easily avoided by taking samples of writing or interviews distributed in time. The charge that documents are rare and expensive is not serious nor likely to be true for long. And, finally, the charge that they are not "scientific" is both question-begging and provincial.

In the second group are the contingent criticisms, those that are true of some documents or of all documents under certain conditions. For nomothetic purposes we admit it is difficult to obtain a truly representative sample, but for idiographic purposes the charge is wholly irrelevant. Oversimplification of personality is an error that distorts many autobiographies, but is found less commonly in diaries. Deliberate deception ruins some documents, but detection of fraud is not impossible. Self-deception is a more ominous menace, but even here detection to a limited degree is known to be successful, and methods will no doubt improve. Self-justification, in the sense of imposing ego-values upon the document, is precisely what the psychologist desires, and is not to be regarded as a shortcoming. And finally, the charge that all people are blind to their own motivations cannot be considered fatal until such a time as psychologists have other more certain ways of obtaining knowledge of ultimate motivations. Since such methods cannot be said to exist at the present time, the subject's own statement of the case seems to merit a respectful hearing. When psychologists know more about fundamental motives than they do they may discover:

(a) that "ultimate" motives are not as different from conscious motives as has been thought; or (b) that other and surer avenues to ultimate motivation at last being available personal documents can be given up as a source of information concerning needs, desires and drives.

In the final group of criticisms we include the charges that conceptualization is arbitrary and predetermined by the writer or by the commenter. Our conclusion is the same as Blumer's: for the most part documents do seem to take their meaning and intelligibility from the accompanying comments and interpretations. Only rarely do we find a truly inductive use of documents. Even where induction is used, seldom, if ever, do we find that the interpretation of the document is *compulsory*. Sometimes it is clearly forced or strained; but more often it seems to be merely *one* of *many* possible interpretations that could be imposed upon the material.

Any life, it seems, can be fitted into a variety of frames, and no way has been found to compel psychologists to let the case dictate its own proper frame. Whether this difficulty lies with the users of the documents, or whether it is inherent in the method itself, is a problem to which we return in Chapter 12.

Chapter 11

The Case for Personal Documents

THE ONLY REASONABLE thing to do if one wishes to study a phenomenon is to put a specimen before one's eyes and look at it repeatedly until its essential features sink indelibly into one's mind. Later, dissection and ablation may be used to gain acquaintance with details. But unless the fundamental interrelations are first grasped, analysis is likely to be aimless.

The subject matter of psychology is particularly elusive, being almost altogether a matter of invisible processes and invisible causes. Subject matter so unfathomably complex needs more than the usual amount of concrete inspection before analysis and abstraction begin. Yet, to the layman, the chief fault with psychological science seems to be its willingness to pile abstraction upon abstraction with little regard for the concrete personal life. In the personal document can be found the needed touchstone of reality. Unless concrete psychology progresses along with abstract psychology, the discipline is likely to run wild.

Several of the investigations we have already considered may be regarded as adventures in concrete psychology. Through the use of personal documents Plaut (145) found what some of the distinctive psychological problems of the soldier are; Henry (93) secured an orientation in the field of sex variants; Allport, Bruner, and Jandorf (12) uncovered major effects of revolution upon personality; Cantril (45) entered for the first time into the field of radio panic. Since

there are no facts in psychology that are divorced from personal lives, the human document is the most obvious place to find these facts in their raw state.

Behavioral observation, it is true, can be employed for an initial view of certain aspects of conduct, but it is inferior to the personal document when it comes to the important region of subjective meaning: experiences of love, beauty, religious faith; of pain, ambition, fear, jealousy, frustration; plans, remembrances, fantasies, and friendships; none of these topics comes fully within the horizon of psychologists without the aid of personal reporting. If these regions are excluded mental science finds itself confined to a shadowy subject-matter.

Moreover, documents are especially valuable in the training of students. Not only are they absorbing in their interest, but they constantly serve as an admonition to both student and teacher. "Here, see for yourself," they seem to say, "this is what we are talking about." Nor is this admonition out of place with psychologists well along the road to research.

LEARNING ABOUT THE EGO AND THE ORGANISM

Since personal documents are inevitably ego-involved, they are of particular value to those forms of psychology (psychoanalysis, personalistic psychology, self-psychology, individual psychology, ego-psychology) that focus upon the central rather than the peripheral organization in mental life. They show the cognitive and affective context of behavior. An example of what we mean may be cited from Cantril's work on the ways in which fear entered the lives of individuals who were panic-stricken when they heard the broadcast *The War of the Worlds*. Some listeners, he found, reacted with fear on the basis of their feelings of economic insecurity, others, on the basis of their religious beliefs; others, because of their awe

before the mysterious attainments of science. In each case a sphere of personal meaning was decisive in arousing the fear. Using the same method this investigator elsewhere (44) has studied the subjective significance of membership in various social movements—in Father Divine's kingdom, in the Oxford Group, in lynching mobs, and in revolutionary activities. In all these cases the important thing is found to be the significance of membership for advancing the ego-values of the individual.

In longitudinal documents we have the possibility of watching the course of development and change in personality: what the ego demands at the start, how it expands in its wants, how it views the world at successive stages. Such information is found in autobiographies and diaries, and apart from recent attempts at long-term growth-studies, such documents are the only way we have of following through the course of development over a period of years.

In a personal document items in a life are put together as and when the subject sees them to belong together. Many a time in recent years we have heard devastating attacks upon test-methods because they yield scores that are meaningless when divorced from the context of the life. Terman, who has done as much as any psychologist for the cause of testing, makes the point:

> The clinical approach is absolutely necessary for the investigation of personality as a whole, for a true picture of personality cannot be pieced together from any number of test scores. The total is an organismic, not an additive, total. (178, p. 607)

It is evident that personal documents aid the investigator in maintaining this organismic approach that is nowadays regarded as essential. If nothing else could be said in favor of the personal document, this advantage alone would seem to justify its wider use.

CONSTRUCTING TYPES

After combing through a collection of personal documents the investigator is very likely to ask himself, "Whatever can I do with all this material?" His solution, more often than not, is to cluster the cases according to similarities that he perceives from the point of view of his special interest. It is true that the criteria for the construction of types are in dispute, and that clustering is almost always an arbitrary procedure. But the situation is no worse than in the typing of behavioral observations, attitude scales, or experimental results. Continuity, not discontinuity, is the rule. Yet for certain purposes, typological groupings seem desirable. It was pointed out in Chapter 3 that investigators have designated many types from an inspection of personal documents: religious and occupational types; types of unemployed, of creative workers, of sex deviants. There seems no end to the possibilities of this procedure, although up to now the method and its products are loosely conceived. Investigators do not distinguish between empirical and ideal types, nor state explicitly their criteria for clustering. Much work remains to be done before the typing of documents can be considered satisfactory. The whole question of types in social and psychological science urgently calls for investigation and clarification. When this is accomplished the handling of personal documents will improve.

ADVANCING NOMOTHETIC AND IDIOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Alexis Carrel has said that although the single case does not discover a law it does discover that there is a law. This is a point that the severest critics of case documents would admit. Usually this acknowledgment is phrased in terms of the value of documents for yielding "hunches," "insights" or "tentative hypotheses." A single case, anyone would concede, can have the value of arousing ideas in the investigator's

mind, even though from there he may jump as quickly as possible into analytical, laboratory research.

But the value of personal documents does not stop here. Our survey, especially Chapters 3 and 4, has shown that even from the nomothetic point of view the investigator can on the basis of multiple documents derive generalizations in a relatively inductive manner.

Assuming that the documents are to be used in a nomothetic way, the question of size of sample intrudes itself. If, for example, it is maintained that all human behavior can be reduced to the operation of four basic wishes, operating singly or in combination, then many cases must be employed to establish such first-order variables in human nature. The criticism is rightly made that Thomas and Znaniecki did not employ enough cases. On the other hand, if the hypothesis deals with a rare and unusual occurrence, a few instances seem sufficient. We recall again the case of Dda's parathyroid deficiency (58).

If this line of reasoning about numbers is sound, it would follow that for an hypothesis dealing with a phenomenon so rare that it is found in only one single life, only the personal document of that life itself, properly employed, is required. That there are lawful happenings uniquely occurring is the argument upon which all idiographic research is based.

The difference between the nomothetic and idiographic interests lies largely in the coarseness and fineness of the generalization that is sought. Certain statements of tendency in human nature seem *approximately* true for every mortal, or for large groups of mortals. There is no reason why these tendencies cannot be traced through a comparative study of documents. Previous chapters have shown considerable success in this very direction. On the other hand, since every individual has his own personalized tendencies to action,

and since these too may be considered lawful behavior, the idiographic analysis of the single case, for the purpose of searching out such specialized laws, is likewise one of the potential advantages of the personal document.

SQUARING SCIENCE WITH DEMOCRACY

Until recently psychologists have been inclined to detach themselves from politics and from ethics, but social catastrophe is now breaking down this isolation. According to the ethics of democracy, respect and value are to be ascribed to each individual person. But mass methods of research do little to engender understanding or respect for the individual person. A shift of interest to personal documents, a substitution of the clinical for the mass point of view, cannot fail to bring psychological science closer in line with the ethics of democracy (9). Social policy fostering the integrity of personality can be best aided by a science that is interested in understanding the conditions that make for this integrity.

Up to this point we have considered a number of miscellaneous advantages that personal documents have for social and psychological science, but from the point of view of methodology, the basic arguments remain yet to be considered.

MEETING THE THREE TESTS OF SCIENCE

What does science aim to do? The answer, as we piece it together from the writings of many authorities, seems to be that *science aims to give man an understanding, a power of prediction, and a power of control, beyond that which he can achieve through his own unaided common sense.* If we abolish preconceptions as to what the scientific method *must* be, and fix firmly in mind this threefold *goal* of science, we conclude that the study of personal documents unquestionably has its place in science.

It is unfortunate that recent discussions of scientific method (and of the unity of science) have produced a ritualism that seems to say that the *language* of science is more important than its *purposes*. Our position, on the contrary, is that if the language of personal documents can be shown to enhance understanding, to confer powers of prediction and control, then the use of these documents must be admitted as valid scientific method. No loyalty to an operational logicistic, or objectivist creed can prevent it.

Before considering the capacity of personal documents to meet these three tests of science, let it be pointed out that although understanding, prediction, and control tend to vary together, they do not necessarily do so. We can, for example, *predict* that a paranoid patient will behave true to his delusion without being able to understand the causes of his condition or to prevent its continuance. We can *understand* at least some of the causes of war, but cannot at present either predict its course or prevent its coming. Finally, we can *control* a population through force without in the least degree understanding its mentality or predicting its behavior if the control is slackened. Since these aims of science are, therefore, to a degree independent, it is necessary to mark the contribution of personal documents to each, separately.

One other preliminary word. As we have insisted in Chapter 4 and elsewhere, the case for personal documents can be presented in two parts: first its contribution to nomothetic science, and secondly its contribution to idiographic science. We can *understand* nomothetically or idiographically; we can *predict* nomothetically or idiographically; and we can *control* in the same two ways. The extent to which personal documents aid in all six of these scientific intentions will now be considered.

It has been said that a *Gesetzwissenschaft* employs a single case merely in order to help it understand a general principle, whereas a *Geschichtswissenschaft* employs a general principle merely in order to help it understand a single case. In either instance, a close interdependence of *general* and *special* knowledge is implied.

Not only is an initial acquaintance with particulars necessary for the construction of general principles, but in the last analysis no general principles can ever be applied except to concrete and particular objects. Thus, the individual case stands at the gateway and terminus of generalized knowledge. What is more, generalized knowledge is continually being enriched by its interpenetration with what is special and concrete. Philosophers since Aristotle have marveled at man's ability to reflect upon the concrete and to bring to bear upon it such general knowledge as he possesses, and in the process to modify his generalizations by incorporating as much as will fit of the unique instance. This interweaving, philosophers have held, presupposes an active intellect (*intellectus agens*) capable of shifting its focus continuously from the general to the particular and back again.

The purpose of this short excursion into the theory of knowledge is to establish the fact that *insight* is always a joint product of acquaintance with particulars (idiographic understanding) *and* inferential knowledge (nomothetic understanding). One without the other is impossible, although it is true that for some purposes (e.g., psychophysics, vital statistics) the final form the knowledge takes is universalized, whereas for other purposes (clinical work, historical portraiture), the knowledge is finally expressed in the individual mold. What is important for our purposes is that in either instance the

single case (as it may be represented in personal documents) plays a vital role in understanding.

Blumer has pointed out how an extensive and intimate acquaintance with Polish peasant life was a necessary precondition of the generalizations reached by Thomas and Znaniecki. This observation was intended as a criticism of the lack of objectivity in the scientific product and as a complaint that no one without this first-hand acquaintance could understand the generalizations in their full significance. To this objection Znaniecki has correctly replied (29, p. 88) "But is it not the same in every kind of research that is dealing with concrete complexities or interconnected empirical data?" In other words, first-hand acquaintance with the data *must* be presupposed not only on the part of those who create generalizations but on the part of those who would understand them.

To sum up: no understanding of general laws is possible without some degree of acquaintance with particulars. If we may assume that the concrete and the general are of *equal* importance in the production of psychological understanding, it follows that case materials (including personal documents) should claim *half* of the psychologist's time and attention.

In the German language there is a large literature on the process of understanding, but only a few discussions of the problem are available in English. In America there is antipathy toward the investigation of the nature of understanding because of the subjective and nonquantitative issues involved. Yet even the most positivistic of scientists can scarcely be excused from settling down to the task of finding out how his own mind, the most sensitive recording machine ever devised, is capable of registering multiple variables and discerning relationships between them.

A suggestive attempt in this very direction is Lazarsfeld's description of the technique that he christens *discerning* (113). The concrete problem dealt with concerns the effects of unemployment upon the bread winner's status within his own family. Lazarsfeld is aware of the criticism made by statisticians against unproved pronouncements regarding causal relationships; but he is equally aware of the impossibility of assuming that a mere correlation between two variables signifies causation. He writes

> An assumption is often made that only quantitative procedures can be communicated, whereas all other procedures (insight, understanding) must be left to the inspiration of the student and to the exigencies of the problem in hand. The non-quantitative methods cannot be formulated as explicitly as an arithmetic computation. But these procedures, now clothed in ambiguous terms, still remain to be described and standardized. (113, p. ix)

The specific procedure Lazarsfeld advocates is presented as a method for determining the causal relationship between two variables. The first step in *discerning* is verification of the occurrence in question. Do two or more sources agree that a happening (e.g., growing irritability on the part of the father) has occurred? If so, does some one allege that this happening is caused by his loss of a job? If this causation is alleged (experienced), then questions are asked to specify the nature of the interconnection, and reasons for believing it is true. Then, "the next check of evidence for the causal relation between unemployment and the change is an attempt to discover whether the alleged condition is consistent with what we know of the life of the respondent." Discerning is easier if there has been a sudden change; if the change is gradual it may be due to longstanding trends in the personality, and not to the intrusion of unemployment. A final step in the process consists in trying out all *alternative* explanations for the change. Since "the more we know about

the phenomena we are studying, the more hypotheses we can evolve as to the possible alternative interpretations of observed changes," it is necessary at this final stage to rule out those that fail to account completely for the pattern of happenings recorded. Lazarsfeld has made a good beginning with the understanding of causal relations.

When we ask ourselves "What is the process of common sense comprehension?" the answer in rough form seems to be as follows: we read a document; our interest in the case engenders a selective attention resulting from the progressive patterning of the case. While interest is riveted upon the pattern, generalized knowledge comes to mind through associative (inferential) processes. This knowledge is selected and rigidly constrained by the objective pattern which is the focus of our interest. The generalizations become recast swiftly into an ad hoc interpretation of the case in question. This process of interaction between the general (inferential) knowledge and the particular (intuitive) knowledge constitutes an act of *insight*. Sometimes the interpretations gained in this way are accepted merely on the basis of conviction ("a little bell rings in the breast"); but sometimes they are submitted to subsequent checks, such as (a) endorsement by independent investigators, (b) internal consistency and self-confrontation, and (c) predictive success of the interpretations.

Mannheim has proposed that a given case be viewed from as many points of view as possible. That is to say, the investigator may assume different frames of reference in pondering the case. By thus structuring the situation over and over again in an experimental way, an integration of insights occurs that represents a presumably more valid analysis. It might be added that since any one investigator is limited in his versatility, an argument could be made for pooling, as in

a diagnostic conference, the insights of various investigators. One might add that up to the present time too much research has been done by the single investigator scrutinizing *many* cases, and not enough by many investigators scrutinizing the *same* case.

PREDICTION

As stated in Chapter 2, the pioneer steps in predicting behavior from the case study have been taken by Stouffer; Cavan, Hauser, Stouffer; Hanks; Cartwright and French; and Polansky. The technique employed by these investigators might be labeled *controlled cross-predictions*. Prediction as to the future is not involved in these particular investigations. The experimenter presents personal data to the judge and asks him to tell what scores the subject would be likely to achieve on certain personality tests, or how he would be likely to fill out a questionnaire, or what social attitudes he would be likely to endorse. Assuming that spurious overlap is guarded against, the test becomes one of determining how correctly the judge can extend his image of a person from known data to other data not known to him but already available to the experimenter. All of the experiments show positive results, sometimes strikingly high, depending both on the adequacy of the data given the judge and upon the latter's skill.

In this type of research it is necessary to guard against one curious source of error. When predicting for a number of subjects the judge might obtain a high degree of success if he predicted merely the most common response. He might, for instance, safely predict behavior that is almost universally characteristic of men. The result would not show his acumen for the particular case in question. To predict that a young man of twenty will soon marry is, in the majority of cases,

certain to be correct but displays no particular shrewdness. It is necessary, therefore, for experimenters to establish what a *true* chance score might be before estimating the success of their judges in prediction. In some instances this precaution has been taken; in others, not.

For temporal prediction (a neglected problem) the technique employed by two of the writer's students (in unpublished studies) seems suggestive. J. S. Harding, working with the autobiography of Floyd Dell (61), studied the ability of a score of judges who had read the *first* half of the book (in a condensed version) to *predict* events reported only in the second half. Working with a separate (unpublished) autobiography, M. B. Smith studied the ability of readers of the *second* half of the document to *postdict* events and conditions recorded only in the first half. Although different documents were used and although the evidence is scant, it seems likely that *prediction* may be more successful than *postdiction.* If this finding is substantiated, the consequence for theories of personality will be considerable. The technique employed also has the merit of ascertaining for what regions of personality prediction or postdiction is most accurate.

The instances of prediction we have been discussing are essentially idiographic in character. They do not represent the type of prediction usually thought of in science. Whether or not psychology can be expected to predict for the individual is a question raised by Guthrie (85):

> Science labors at a great disadvantage in predicting the behavior of individuals because the best source of that prediction is the past behavior of the individual in question. A textbook of psychology cannot be burdened with several million biographies kept up to date. But this would be necessary to foretell what Jones or Brown will do in this or that set of circumstances. Science must be confined to very general rules applicable to individual cases, but science cannot be bothered with the application. This must be left to the person who knows the case and its history. Nowhere is science at a greater disadvantage in prediction than in the description and understanding of personality. (85, p. 147)

Guthrie is right in saying that a good source of prediction is knowledge of the past behavior of the individual. But he is wrong in saying that prediction in the single case can be no concern of science. If psychology cannot help in forecasting, guiding, or in restraining the conduct of individuals in accordance with the requirements of social well-being, it is a science of little value.

The problem of the prediction of "personal adjustment" is one to which various social scientists, and, recently, the Social Science Research Council, have given attention. Studies by Burgess, Cottrell, the Gluecks, Terman, and by Olson, Haggerty, and Wickman have had to do with predictions of marital adjustment, of parole success, of juvenile delinquency. In these studies the method employed is to find variables *frequently* present in marital success, in parole violation, or in juvenile delinquency. If enough of these variables are found to be present in a *new* case, then this case is designated in advance as a likely success or a likely failure. So long as large numbers of cases are concerned, there is no flaw in this reasoning. The prediction is like that of life insurance companies, and in the long run is dependable in the sense that actuarial predictions are always dependable.

Where this reasoning seriously trips is in prediction applied to the single case instead of to a population of cases. A fatal non sequitur occurs in the reasoning that if 80 per cent of the delinquents who come from broken homes are recidivists, then *this* delinquent from a broken home has an 80 per cent chance of becoming a recidivist. The truth of the matter seems to be that *this* delinquent has either 100 per cent certainty of becoming a repeater or 100 per cent certainty of going straight. If all the causes in his case were known, we could predict for him perfectly (barring environmental accident). His chances are determined by the pattern of his

life and *not* by the frequencies found in the population at large. Indeed, *psychological causation is always personal and never actuarial.* The only way to make a certain prediction of effect from cause is to study the life in which the causes operate, and not a thousand other lives. This is not to deny that actuarial prediction has its place (in dealing with masses of cases); it is good so far as it goes, but idiographic prediction goes further.

One error in actuarial predictions stems from the assumption that the same apparent circumstances have the same meaning (and therefore the same causal value) for all individuals. For instance, the fact that a man is married is often taken as a basis for predicting that he will be more cautious and more dependable in his work. In a majority of cases this relation is found to hold, and for the majority the prediction is successful. But for a *given* individual the *same* circumstance may lead to recklessness and crime. Knowing what his marriage *means* to a man is the only way of determining its value for the prediction of his behavior.

These considerations have a direct bearing upon the use of personal documents for it is evident that the subjective meanings which completely evade the actuarial predictors are disclosed in personal reporting. Furthermore, documents yield relatively *complete* information which supplies more of the variables needed for correct prediction than are usually taken into account in straight actuarial practice.

There is one point of view toward case study prediction that does not seem admissible, even though it is advocated by able students of method. It is a view that underestimates the unique value of case studies by attempting to order them under the process of actuarial predicting. This procedure has the effect of declaring prediction from the single case to be merely an inferior type of statistical reasoning.

The logic of this position rests upon the contention that forecasting of future events must depend upon one of two sets of circumstances: (a) knowledge of the frequency of relations in the general population (pure actuarial prediction), or (b) knowledge of the frequency of the same happening (under similar instigations) in the past life of the individual. In either case we are told our prediction depends upon *recurrence,* i.e., upon past frequencies. In this contention we see the persistence of Hume's theory of causation and the long tradition of Anglo-Saxon empiricism which has always exalted the principle of "frequency of connections." This tradition, of course, provides the intellectual climate of American social science: without it, the commanding influence of the statistical outlook could not have developed.

But is it true that these two basic assumptions of frequency exhaust the mental operations that are applied to successful predictions in a single case? A murderer seldom commits more than one murder. Therefore, we cannot reason from his previous behavior that when conditions are thus and so, he will commit murder. The act is a one-time happening. Although no frequencies are involved, the deed is *determined* and, scientifically speaking, lawful. It should then be predictable. Bjerre's study of three murderers (27) strongly suggests that had the patterns of these lives been known before the act, prediction would have been possible, even though none of the three men had committed previous murders, and even though for none could an analogue have been found in the general population that would have led to an actuarial prediction of the event.

Let us add two other instances where prediction in social science seems to have nothing whatever to do with frequency (and therefore with statistics):

(1) A hundred years ago the poet Heine brought together in his own

mind a number of contemporary trends in German mentality: hero worship and mercilessness (derived from the ancient myths), self-righteous rationality (Kant), supremacy of the Idea (Fichte), inventiveness (natural science), the restraining power of Christianity, plus certain political considerations. Out of this confluence he made a prediction which today seems to be a remarkably exact forecasting of Naziism. He foresaw the consequences of this patterned relationship. Was his prediction actuarial? It could not be. Kant was *new,* Fichte was *new,* natural science was *new.* There had been little experience with these items in the past, and no experience with their potentiality for the future, and no experience with their mutual interaction that was to occur only *in the future.* The pattern was *einmalig,* occurring never before in history. It would be sophistry to speak of this single situation as a subclass of general laws, weighted for the occasion. General laws cannot be general if they have not yet operated; weighting is not involved if some trends are foreseen as reinforcing and some as inhibiting one another depending *not upon their present intensity,* but upon their mutual interdependence *in the future.* Actuarial predictions always depend upon frequency and there is here no frequency.

(2) To take a different example from guidance (prediction of personal adjustment for the future): a strangely neurotic lad, having a queer feeling of inferiority due to the high degree of fame his father had achieved, meets and falls in love with a blind girl, having a curious pattern of personality apparently unlike anything the counsellor had ever encountered. Will they be happy together in their own peculiar way? The counsellor sees a latency in each (traits that are neither intense nor frequent in expression), which he decides might develop under the vicissitudes of marriage. He predicts success and is right. Is this an actuarial prediction? Since the combination never occurred before in his experience, and since mechanical weighting was impossible because not present intensity but *latency* had to be considered, the answer is in the negative.

What is outstanding in the above instances is the perception by some predictor of *latent trends,* not yet operating, that will in time ripen and lead to certain consequences. Tendency, in the psychological sense, is always a personal condition, not (as in statistics) an expression of past frequencies. If I say that my friend will probably turn Catholic, take up gardening, relax his interest in politics, and stop smoking, I am arguing for nonexistent forms of behavior, and am predicting transformations which have not yet occurred.

If predictions based on frequency were all that were pos-

sible, then a Hollerith machine worked on the basis of known frequencies by a robot could predict future behavior as well as a sensitive judge. What is missing from the code-and-frequency device is the *perceiving* of *relations,* the reasoning as from present indications to *changes* (not repetitions) that will occur in the course of time, and the variation of prediction by recognition of contingent factors (allowing, for example, for probable changes in the environment).

The epistemology involved in this line of reasoning has more in common with the *intellectus agens* posited by Leibnitz, Whitehead, and Köhler than it has with the passive intellect posited by Hume, Mill, and Guthrie.

Two practical consequences for research grow out of the problem just reviewed.

(1) Studies should be made of the relative success of actuarial and case study predictions. If sensitive judges employing adequate documents commonly excel in their forecasting, we shall know that actuarial predictions are not the apex of scientific possibility, and shall conclude that the prevailing empirical theory is too meager to apply to the optimum level of prediction.[1]

(2) Studies should be made of the *process* of predicting both when actuarial techniques (or time-series frequencies in the individual's behavior) are involved and when they are not. How does the layman make successful predictions? How does the social scientist? Only an investigation of this point

[1] Already here seems to be considerable evidence that case study prediction excels. The experiments of Estes (67), F. H. Allport and N. Frederiksen (4), and Polansky (147) are all relevant. To be sure these experiments are limited in scope; but they can be, and should be, extended. Perhaps the best evidence in favor of case study predictions is the telling fact that school counselors, prison officers, psychiatrists, clinicians of all sorts, seem *never* to rest a prognosis upon psychometric evidence or upon data coded and sorted by machines. They find the case study indispensable for optimum results. How then is it possible to argue that case study prediction is merely an inferior version of statistical prediction?

will help to settle the dispute between those who believe that reasoning from personal documents is merely a case of "sloppy statistics" and those who believe that the sensitive recording machine of the human mind perceives relations and tendencies in other terms than mechanical weighting.

An extension of this problem is the determination of those qualities and forms of training that lead to superior predictive power. All studies involving prediction have shown that there are *good* predictors and *poor* predictors, and that this difference is in the main a *generalized* difference. To find out what makes a good predictor *good* would advance us far in our understanding of those mental operations that make for success in forecasting.

CONTROL

The third aim of psychological science is the *control* of human behavior (in accordance with some socially approved standard). Here the case study (and the personal document) are likewise indispensable. Psychological therapy proceeds largely upon the case basis. The arts of medicine, social work, counseling, require the practitioner to individualize his general knowledge and to adapt it to the special case. Here the interaction between nomothetic and idiographic understanding is essential. Nor should we forget the importance of the case document in helping the therapeutist keep in line with the social standards by which his work is to be evaluated. In a democratic society the therapeutist is required to advance the welfare of the *person:* personal documents tell him wherein this welfare consists.

In quite another sense, personal documents may lead to the formation of useful social policies. Interviews with soldiers may help to guide military practices; case studies of consumers suggest economic reforms; letters to the editor or to

congressmen provide a barometer of public opinion. Up to now, to be sure, the use of such documentary evidence has been sporadic and haphazard. Social science might easily help in perfecting these indices of public needs. Why are letters to the editor or congressmen generally *against* something rather than *for* something? How many letters make a fair sample of public opinion? There are many such questions dealing with the relation between documents and social policy which need to be explored.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has stated both major and minor arguments for the employment of case documents in psychological science. The reader may more readily assent to some of the arguments than to others. Actually it is necessary to assent to only one of them in order to justify the employment and improvement of personal documents as instruments of social and psychological research.

Much more experimental and critical work needs to be done in order to establish fully the somewhat radical hypothesis advanced in this chapter to the effect that all the primary goals of science (understanding, prediction, and control) can be reached more directly and more effectively through the admittance of an idiographic view of the single case to a position of prominence equal to that now held by the nomothetic tradition.

The evidence in hand justifies our plea for the use and refinement of those common sense modes of mental operation which are characteristically concerned with the behavior of the single case in all its patterned complexity. Unless these tools of common sense are admitted to the equipment of the social disciplines it is difficult to see how these disciplines can in the future outstrip naked common sense. Up to the present

time—is it not obvious?—in dealing with human problems common sense is more often trusted than is social science. This need not always be true if social science will but add to its nomothetic techniques an increment from the methods employed to such advantage by common sense itself.

Chapter 12

The Problem of Conceptualization

It is easier to get two readers of a personal document to agree upon what happened than it is to get accord on why it happened. Likewise, it is easier for a single reader to sit back and enjoy the narrative, perhaps identifying with the writer, sympathizing with his predicaments, and free-associating from one incident to similar incidents in his own life, than it is to keep strenuously at the task of discovering causal connections, salient structure, and the pattern of determinants that confer "theoretical sense" upon the life. No psychologist, analyzing a document in a professional capacity, can be content with such passive enjoyment. His scientific conscience compels him to *interpret* what he reads. And as soon as he does his interpreting he must ask whether his conclusions agree with those of other competent analysts.

Interpretation or conceptualization may be defined as any theorizing that is imposed upon a raw narrative. It is likely to occur at various stages in the complex process of writing —reading—editing—commenting. In the initial stage the subject himself imposes theory, even before the document comes into the psychologist's hands. For the most part, this imposition of theory is *implicit*. The writer omits data that to him are unessential in his self-revelation, thereby implying that he himself knows the causes, the values, the directions that are of major significance in his life. By stressing experiences that he regards as central to his ego, he defines in advance the

nature of his ego. Occasionally, especially if he is psychologically sophisticated, he may go further and give *explicit* conceptualization. He may invoke Adler, Freud, or perhaps the conditioned reflex to help him to account for his own behavior.

Implicit conceptualization takes place, likewise, when the subject is compelled to follow a questionnaire-guide or to respond to specific interrogation in the course of an interview. Here the investigator intrudes selective questions and impresses the raw data in advance with his own theoretical expectations and weightings.

When the document passes into the hands of the psychologist further explicit interpretation takes place. He may write footnotes or a foreword to the document, or he may write an interpretative monograph in which he merely quotes excerpts from the document, or a theoretical treatise punctuated by illustrative materials from many personal documents. The interpretations of a psychologist may range from parenthetical remarks to system building.

The forms in which conceptualization occur can be summarized as follows:

Implicit
- a Selection of entries (by writer, or by investigator through questionnaire-guide)
- b Grouping or classifying of entries (by writer, or by investigator through instruction or editing)

Explicit
- c Statements of relations (by writer or by investigator in his comments)
  - 1 Structural relations (habits, traits, interests, attitudes, complexes)
  - 2 Causal relations (environmental forces, motivational processes, projective mechanisms, and the like)
- d Systematization in terms of some embracing psychological theory or school of thought.

Whether the conceptualization is merely casual and incidental or whether it is so prominent as to overshadow the narrative, the problem of *validity* is the same. In Chapter 10 it was pointed out that probably the greatest weakness in the psychologist's use of personal documents lies in the arbitrariness of his interpretations. There are so many possible preconceptions, so many ways of forcing documents to fit molds, and so many different psychological languages in which a case can be satisfyingly interpreted, that one wonders whether personal documents can ever lead to one and only one *necessary* conceptualization.

Blumer, impressed with the same dilemma in the use of documents, has pointed out that theoretical categories, congenial and self-evident to one investigator, seeming to him to fit the case without the remainder, are rejected by another as arbitrary and strained. The interpretations derived by Thomas and Znaniecki from Vładek's autobiography and from other Polish documents are brilliant, but we can readily imagine that equally brilliant, if sharply contrasting, interpretations would result were these documents analyzed by Dollard, Horney, Jung, Mead, or Spranger.

INDUCTION VS. ILLUSTRATION

We have already indicated a possible continuum in the degree to which investigators employ personal documents inductively. At one extreme might fall instances where the investigator, his mind innocent of preconceptions and hypotheses (if such a thing were possible), immerses himself in his documents until from the piling up of evidence he is compelled to draw such and such inferences and interpretations, never before dreamed of by him. If such wholly inductive research could be found it would, presumably, be free from preconceptions and from arbitrariness. But it is impossible

to claim that any such completely inductive studies exist. In earlier pages it was made clear that certain researches may be considered *in large part* inductive since the conclusions reached were unexpected by the investigator and were clearly a product of the documents employed. But even in these studies we cannot contend that the investigator's own psychological frames of reference did not come forth, as it were, to meet the data half way. Preconceptions cannot be entirely avoided.

A revealing experimental study by Harvey (90) bears on the effects of preconception in the interview situation. This investigator found that a generalized preconception (e.g., predilection for one theory of human motivation) was not nearly so prejudicial to correct inferences from an occupational interview as was a *specialized* conviction or obsessive idea (e.g., a prejudice against the interviewee's "type," or narrowly preconceived notions as to the qualifications demanded by certain occupations). Pet categories, narrow prejudices, preconceived pigeonholes are very harmful; while generalized but flexible theories of personality are less harmful. What we should work for, in dealing with human material, Harvey concludes, is a broad mind but not an empty mind, a theoretical mind but one not overstructured with detailed convictions.

Still whatever he does, the psychologist's own frame of reference seems to get in his way. If he is Marxist he sees significance in the class membership of the subject; if he is Kretschmerian, he bears heavily upon the implications of constitutional types; if he is Freudian, it is the toilet training or the Oedipus situation that captures his attention. More subtle, but just as effective, are other favorite theories: conditioning, frustration-aggression, cultural-determinism, compensation, functional autonomy. The psychologist's own men-

tal perches are where the document comes home to roost.

Our problem is to discover safeguards that can be used to reduce the arbitrariness in interpretation to a minimum, and ways of encouraging the inductive use of documents, so that interpretations will follow, if possible, in a *necessary* manner from the documents themselves.

Blumer's decision to locate the research of Thomas and Znaniecki somewhere in the middle range of the continuum of induction-illustration, may be said to apply to the majority of all the serious researches in psychology that have employed personal documents. At the far end of the continuum we find a few investigators who cast about until they hit on a document that fits the predetermined theory and then present it solely for purposes of illustration. Or, if they *start* with a document it merely serves to remind them of their pet conceptualization which is then unfolded and made to overspread the document perfectly. This *illustrative* use of documents seems to some critics to be especially characteristic of psychoanalytic publications. At the other end of the scale, there are no studies that can be considered to lead directly and exclusively to *inductive* conceptualizations, though we have cited several which approximate this ideal. The majority, we repeat, fit Blumer's intermediate category where an interweaving of the raw case and the pre-existing frame occurs.

NOMOTHETIC AND IDIOGRAPHIC CONCEPTUALIZATION

Let us consider two student autobiographies, very different in type. The first, Victor's, is written according to a nomothetic plan. Tests, a psychograph, and a questionnaire-guide are employed. The writer considers himself in relation to population standards. Highly intelligent, moderately aggressive, unusually interested in social welfare, even in temper, a product of small-town culture and a victim of racial preju-

dice, he states all his characteristics, so far as possible, in terms of *objective* norms, and accounts for himself, so far as possible, in terms of accepted psychological mechanisms of growth and development. The second document, Michael's, is contrasting in type—spilling over with individuality, hot emotion, and lawless disregard for psychological terminology and scientific categories. It tells the story of a pugilistic Irishman, both sensitive and tough, loving both ranch life and culture, suffering bitter humiliation because of a persistent enuresis.

Several times these two documents have been submitted to psychologists for evaluation. A curious fact emerges: half prefer Victor's and half Michael's, even when judgments are asked for in terms of the *scientific* merit of the two documents. If we may be so bold as to judge the judges, it seems to be the experimentally-minded and positivistic psychologists who prefer Victor's case and the clinically-minded psychologists who select Michael's.

In interpreting Victor's life the psychologist follows along already established pathways. Behavior and thought are accounted for in terms of familiar categories. The theories required are standard theories. The case seems to be adequately conceptualized by bringing to bear upon it general principles now current. Michael's case, on the other hand, seems to *demand* formulations that express the "teleonomic trends," the unique laws, that direct this particular young man's behavior.

From these cases we derive a principle of considerable importance in conceptualization. One case, it turns out, may be interpretable by scaling according to standard variables, and by involving standard theories: that is to say, we may find a *typical* Freudian case, a *typical* Marxist, a *typical* Kretschmerian case, or more likely, one that can be con-

ceptualized easily by a *mixture* of such standard theories. On the other hand, we sometimes find cases that are far more deviant, more alien to current theories, seeming to require original formulations, unique terminology and an appeal not to "common," but to strictly "individual" traits in their interpretation. If this reasoning is correct, we are again stating the argument of the previous chapter which held that understanding is always a matter of bringing general knowledge to bear upon the unique quality of a situation and constraining this knowledge into new molds by an act of insight. In cases like that of Michael, considerable originality is demanded in the interpretation. In cases like that of Victor, the generalized mold need not be greatly modified.

WHEN IS A CONCEPTUALIZATION VALID?

An interpretation may be intended to explain a single act or a whole life. In either case it requires some standards by which the investigator and his critics may appraise the explanation. Too often an investigator draws what conclusions he wishes, making no effort to prove their correctness, and the reader in turn either agrees or disagrees with the conclusions without attempting to test their validity.

Whether or not any theory in social science can demonstrate its validity was a question discussed by conferees at a meeting called by the Social Science Research Council in December, 1938. In the report of this meeting (29) various criteria for the validating of a social theory were presented. Briefly summarized, they are as follows:

1. *Feelings of subjective certainty.* The illuminative power of a theory for the investigator who propounds (or accepts) it, though by no means an adequate proof of its validity, is an indicator not to be discarded altogether. Subjective certainty is one sign that suggests a good fit of nomothetic knowledge with specific evidence, though it can never be taken alone.

2. *Conformity with known facts.* To include known facts and to

exclude none is demanded as a test for the adequacy of theories in physical science. Important as this criterion may be it is not always easy to apply to social data (e.g., personal documents) where the *facts* are subjective and often ambiguous. But at the same time, salient events in the life cannot remain unaccounted for by any interpretation that pretends to be valid.

3. *Mental experimentation.* Although the process has never been fully defined, it is evident that a great deal of mental manipulation is required in testing a theory. Max Weber has proposed the contemplating of an alleged cause or critical factor while attempting to imagine the life without its presence. If the 'experiment' succeeds, then the alleged factor is not crucial. If an interpretation is not indispensable, then it is false. The technique of 'discerning' discussed in the last chapter is essentially an amplification of this same procedure. Still other proposals for separating straight and crooked thinking are relevant to this point. Whatever makes for successful mental problem-solving will help to fashion valid theories.

4. *Predictive power.* If an interpretation aids in making successful predictions, then the interpretation is presumably valid. This criterion is important, but it is not in itself sufficient, for (a) many correct predictions are made on the basis of no theory whatsoever, and (b) accurate predictions are known to be rationalized with theories that are false (as when the Greeks predicted that the sun would rise tomorrow because Apollo never failed to drive his chariot).

5. *Social agreement.* If many people, especially if experts, accept an explanation or conceptualization, it may be said to have the presumption of validity. Here however, lie the pitfalls of prestige-suggestibility, of scientific fad and fashion, and of common prejudice. The criterion takes on greater value if it can be shown that competent investigators have come *independently* to the same conceptualization.

A possible extension of this test (mentioned in Chapter 3) is to submit the interpretation to the subject himself for his endorsement or rejection. Because of the effects of suggestion this procedure would probably be more significant for a negative than for an affirmative judgment. Admittedly an imperfect method of validation, it still seems that some weight should be given to what the subject—who knows the "inside half" of the data—may think of the investigator's interpretation.

6. *Internal consistency.* Parts of an interpretation can be made to confront one another. Logical contradictions raise the suspicion of invalidity. True, the lives to which the interpretations apply are not themselves without contradictions and inconsistencies. And yet, just as a personality has an intricate integration wherein even the inconsistencies often find a deeper resolution, so too should an interpretative scheme applied to the personality have the same intricate properties of self-confrontation and congruence. No part of it should fall out of character.

These seem to be the principal tests which the psychologist or social scientist can apply to his interpretation of personal documents in order to assess their validity. (One common criterion is here deliberately excluded, namely the appeal to the authority of some orthodox frame of thought—e.g., Freudian, Thomistic or Marxist ideology.) None of the criteria alone will tell whether an explanation is faultless, but all of them taken together will go a considerable distance in eradicating the looser and more arbitrary forms of theorizing.

WHEN IS CONCEPTUALIZATION NECESSARY?

While these tests will help to make interpretations of personal documents valid, they do not guarantee that an independent investigator handling the same documents will inevitably reach the same conclusions. There are too many fundamental philosophies of life from which interpretative formulations proceed, and too many ways in which linguistic formulae may be flexed to cover events, to permit us to hope for identical conceptualizations on the part of independent investigators.

This state of affairs, of course, is not in the least peculiar to interpretations of subjective documents. Even the most objective of data in psychology (such as the excursions of a needle on a kymograph caused by a reflex action) can be ordered to diverse explanatory systems—to the mechanistic, the hormic, the configurational, the tropistic, the personalistic, and others. It is not therefore, the subjectivity in personal documents that leads to conflicting interpretations. It is rather the versatility of the human mind in contemplating its own infinite complexity. The fact that there will probably always be a diversity of maps by the aid of which human conduct can be explored and interpreted will have to be admitted. In the last analysis diverse theories (of equal tenability) are inevitable; probably they are also desirable.

This conclusion is not necessarily nihilistic. In Chapter 10 we saw how it is possible to apply certain tests to the validity of personal documents, and in the pages above we have listed aids in judging the validity of interpretations. These steps, if they are adequately observed, will bring a distinct improvement in the present prevalent arbitrariness of interpretation. They will help rule out the less consequent type of thinking. But when we come to systems of thought which determine the more basic elements in a conceptualization, we shall have to admit that valid theorizing is not the same as *necessary* theorizing. Final systematic conceptualization in the case of personal documents, as in the case of all psychological and social data, inevitably displays a margin of personal taste. The best we can do is to encourage diversity in order that systems of thought may cross-fertilize one another, broaden the minds of those who encounter them, and invite collaboration among those who see the matter in different lights.

Chapter 13

Summary

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

IT WAS TOWARD the end of the last century that psychologists and psychiatrists commenced to make use of personal documents. At first we find the somewhat morbid protocols reworked by Lombroso, Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and the French psychiatrists. At about the same time Galton and Hall stumbled onto the method of the questionnaire that proved useful among normal people for exploring regions where objective experiment failed to reach. Soon after, Leuba and Starbuck and Pratt found the questionnaire method indispensable in their studies of religious experiences. Outside the academic sphere the increasing subjectivity of literature, as instanced in the intimate journal of Marie Bashkirtseff, was presaging the breakdown of Victorian reticence, a fact that was to have its influence upon psychological science. In the background lay the spirit of dogmatic phenomenology permeating the classical works of psychology wherein the philosopher-psychologist wrote essentially an autobiography of his own mind. The sudden reaction against dogmatic phenomenology leading to the founding of laboratories and to positivism did not entirely extinguish the psychologist's interest in immediate experience, but did objectify it so that the investigator became less concerned with his *own* mind and more concerned with documentary records of *other* minds.

At the turn of the century all of these influences converged in the first important psychological work to be based exclusively upon the analysis and comparison of personal documents, William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience.* Further impetus came in the vivid personal stories told by Clifford Beers and Helen Keller, both of which interested psychologists deeply. And at the same time Freud's preoccupation with the intensive study of individual problems led an ever widening circle into the study of subjective records.

Until 1920, however, the utilization of personal documents must on the whole be characterized as *uncritical.* It was in the sociological field, specifically in *The Polish Peasant,* that interest in the *method* of the personal document first came into its own. During the past two decades, but especially within the past five years, a notable array of critical and experimental studies has appeared, shedding much light upon a wide range of crucial problems, among them: the degree to which separate analysts working independently will reach identical interpretations; the extent to which the evidence of documents agrees with evidence derived from other sources; the methods for the detection of self-deception in documents; the methods for ascertaining their predictive value; and methods by which valid conceptualization may be secured.

USES OF PERSONAL DOCUMENTS

First-person documents serve a wide variety of purposes. Even in connection with specialized "molecular" research in the psychological laboratory they serve as introspective supplements to objective experimentation; but they become indispensable in the "molar" regions of experience where such broad phenomena as adolescent conflict, religious aspiration, and occupational outlook are the objects of study. Likewise in areas where fantasy life, creative thinking, and

physical or mental abnormality color the personality, first-person documents must be used.

On the practical side they have been employed widely for teaching purposes, for extracting experience germane to social policy (for example, the *Erlebnis* records of German soldiers), and above all for therapeutic ends. Though the possibility of autoanalysis is disputed, and though total cures for neurotic conditions are apparently not achieved on the basis of cathartic writing, in virtually every instance some form of personal benefit results.

Scholarly minds meet more effectively at the level of concrete science than at the ideological level. It is for this reason that the most successful excursions of psychological scientists into the fields of literature, political science, and history have come about through their analysis of personal documents.

Frequently, to be sure, documents, or excerpts therefrom, are employed simply for purposes of illustrating an author's theory. This textbook use is not in itself of methodological significance. On the other hand, genuinely inductive studies are possible. Raw documents have served as the sea upon which authentic scientific voyages of discovery have been launched. The fact that investigators often reach wholly unexpected conclusions shows that their use of the documents is, at least in part, truly inductive. A common result of the inductive use of documents is the construction of typologies which offer the simplest way of redacting one's findings. Although the criteria for a type are not known, the situation is no worse in the clustering of documents than in the clustering of other research data.

In social psychology the study of dyadic relations between two people is possible through an analysis of their correspondence, and circles of friendship may be explored in the personal documents of all members within the circle.

The use of autobiographies for suggesting diagnostic questions upon which to base questionnaires and attitude scales is frequent among makers of tests.

In many instances documents supplement other methods of research, dovetailing into a synthesis of procedures, their findings helping to enhance the credibility of the final result.

Any method that serves so many ends in psychological science demands critical study and continued improvement.

PREPARING A BASIS FOR EVALUATION

It is possible to evaluate the place of personal documents in psychological science from two different points of view. Neither provides a wide enough base; both should be used. In the first place, the entire critique could proceed according to the canons of *nomothetic* knowledge which seeks universally valid laws (holding within the limits of a probable error) for all individuals in a given population. This is the standpoint of nearly all research in the social sciences, and is the criterion by which most critiques of case documents proceed. But a second point of view is possible, less familiar in American research excepting as it is reflected in the so-called "clinical" approach. This point of view, the *idiographic,* insists that lawful happenings may be one-time events, and that frequency is not a necessary test of validity. It argues that training in concrete psychology (with emphasis upon the *interrelata* of one human life) should precede training in abstract psychology, and that even the expert needs repeatedly to return to the concrete life in order to prevent himself from pursuing unnatural cleavages in mental life. Causation, it argues, is personal, and can be understood only from a pluralistic point of view. Nomothetic schema regarding motivation are oversimplified. The fact that practical counseling and therapy seldom proceed on the basis of

actuarial principles without sustained attention to the individual case reinforces the argument. Finally, the scientific requirements of predictive power, control, and understanding are met by the idiographic procedure. All in all, therefore, not only the nomothetic, but likewise the idiographic approach to personal documents must be admitted if a broad enough basis is to be achieved for evaluation.

THE FORMS OF DOCUMENTS

The forms of first-person documents available to the psychologist are (1) *autobiographies* (subforms: the comprehensive, the topical, and the edited); (2) *questionnaires;* (3) *verbatim recordings* (of interviews, dreams, confessions); (4) *diaries* (intimate journals, memoirs, log-inventories); (5) *letters;* and (6) *expressive and projective productions* ("unintentional" personal documents).

Why a person writes a personal document is a question that must be considered by the psychologist wishing to make use of it. Among the motives that operate we find special pleading; exhibitionism; desire for order; desire for personal perspective; for relief from tension; for therapy; for monetary gain; for fulfilling an assignment; for social re-incorporation; scientific interest; literary delight; hope for public service or reform; and occasionally a hope for a literary immortality. If he understands the motive the psychologist is in a better position to determine the symbolic significance of the document for the life of its author, and to determine its probable virtues and defects from the point of view of conscious reporting and unconscious expression.

So far as autobiographical writing is concerned, we find a marked preference among psychologists for unpublished material, and for the documents that are topical rather than comprehensive. Control over the writer is considered desir-

able, hence content is usually prescribed and steps taken to insure that the entries in various autobiographies will be comparable.

The writings of children before the age of puberty are too meager to be of value. Likewise, the events recorded for the most recent year or two preceding the writing lack perspective and proportion, their significance for the future being unknown. A tendency of writers to overstress conflict situations and to pass lightly over the stabilizing and happy years must be taken into account, as well as the overlaying of early events with memories and interpretations appropriate only to later years.

For many purposes it is justifiable to employ edited autobiographies which condense and sharpen the entries; but for some purposes such editing is not allowable. The danger of both topical and edited autobiographies is that they throw the investigator's interest sharply into focus only at the expense of throwing the subject's life badly out of focus. An example might be cited in a recent study of sex variants wherein the personalities of the subjects seem to be set algether within a matrix of sex. Only in a comprehensive autobiography can such special mental conditions be seen in the perspective of the personality as a whole.

Since without some guidance subjects are likely to omit large areas of their experience, various questionnaire-guides have been devised for the purpose of making certain that omissions shall be due to judgment and not to neglect. Their danger is that stilted production will result.

No standard or widely used guide now exists, for there is a preference on the part of each investigator for devising his own according to the immediate purposes of his research or according to his own conception of what a personal document should include. It would be helpful if a synthesis of

available guides were undertaken so that a truly comprehensive outline for self-study might be available. Such an undertaking, however, runs into the major difficulty of imposing implicit conceptualization upon the resulting document. Experience, on the other hand, has shown that subjects can be successfully instructed to take wide liberties with whatever guide is offered, thereby preparing the way for a conceptualization better fitted to the individual case.

Verbatim recording is rapidly increasing in use, owing, in part, to the invention of efficient and invisible sound recording devices. Interviews, the therapeutic process, and spontaneous oral communications are thus brought into the scope of truly personal documents, enlarging immensely their promise for the future.

The most personal of personal documents is the diary. As a source of material it has received numerous tributes, but up to now the praise is in excess of the performance. In spite of the variety of diary forms and of the large number of diary writers there is a scarcity of good documents. Those that have been analyzed come almost altogether from the age of adolescence. The commonest failing in this area of research is for analysts to generalize to the workings of all adolescent minds from their reading of a single document. Systematic comparisons have not been undertaken to any appreciable extent, nor has the reconstruction of a single mental life with necessary ad hoc interpretations. In other words, neither the canons of clear nomothetic research nor those of idiographic investigation have been observed.

Letters are slow in coming into their own although recent investigations show their marked potentiality both for a study of dyadic social relations and for an analysis of the sustained thought-forms and emotional organization of one writer.

Unintentional personal documents are obtained from a wide variety of expressive and projective productions. Literary creations, compositions, art forms, picture interpretations, time budgets, spontaneous dramatic performances, automatic writing, memorabilia, and collections, are among the materials employed. The logic of *projection* rests largely on the assumption that records of fantasy life are indispensable, for as a man fantasies so is he. The logic of *expression* holds that the adverbial coloring of *manner* provides a supplementary language which the psychologist must learn to read in addition to his interpretation based upon the content of documents.

The objection that only a selected minority of people ever undertake to tell us in documents about their mental processes and personalities is not a valid objection from the idiographic point of view which holds that any one document, however atypical, is of interest. From the nomothetic point of view the objection is not insuperable, since ways have been found of obtaining documents from a large and representative cross section.

EVALUATION

Since personal documents are, and always will be, essentially subjective there is no way of convincing the dogged objectivist that he should employ them. Yet, extreme objectivism is going out of fashion (as the present resurgence of phenomenology shows) and we find in the revival of the personal document, on the part of some investigators at least, what amounts to a deliberate act of scientific irreverence. But the conflict is not irreconcilable, for from the objectivist era users of the personal document have learned that a document does not need to stand alone, that supporting evidence can and should be obtained, and that experimentation with

method will enhance the dependability and utility of documents. Objectivism has not eliminated the personal document, but has made for its critical rather than uncritical utilization.

Various studies have demonstrated that quantitative measures of validation are possible, but in addition, that there are nonquantitative indicators such as the general credibility of the subject, the plausibility of the document in terms of past experience, the test of internal consistency or self-confrontation, and of nonquantitative independent evidence.

Gross deception can usually be detected, though subtle deceptions and omissions are hard to discover. The guarantee of anonymity and the invoking of a task-attitude toward the undertaking (freedom from moral evaluation) are the best guarantees against deliberate deception.

So far as self-deception is concerned we must distinguish two possible kinds. In a certain sense, no mortal seems to be able to free himself from a feeling of fundamental rightness in his conduct. Peripheral evils and errors he can report accurately, but the pivots upon which his whole life turns are sacred. Inviolable self-regard seems to be the eternal thread found in all personal documents. But this expression of ego-value is precisely what is wanted in a document. The investigator wishes to know what life looks like from the subjective focus of value. The other kind of self-deception consists of rationalizations and projections that indicate failure of insight, a failure on the part of the subject to see himself as others see him, whether or not he agrees with the verdict. There are indicators here—which with further research could be greatly extended—that enable the psychologist to detect self-deception in this narrow and specific sense.

The inability of any subject to know his own deeper motivations is a complaint often made against the personal docu-

ment, and regarded as virtually fatal by the psychoanalyst. Since the point at issue is a disputed one, namely that ultimate motivation is always hidden and inaccessible, it seems that until psychologists know more than they do about the nature of ultimate motives, the testimony of writers of first-person documents must be heard with respect. Even granted that a writer cannot see the whole of his motivational pattern, he sees enough of it to make his report indispensable to the open-minded analyst.

Oversimplification exists in autobiographical writing, more so than in diary writing; but perhaps not more so than in any method of objective research. It is an unsolved problem to find means of distinguishing *spurious* from *legitimate* assertions of integration and consistency in self-reporting.

The effects of mood upon production are not difficult to guard against, and hence the accusation of unreliability in the sample of one writer's documents is not serious. Errors of memory are not impossible to prevent, or, at least, to detect, and the fact that in recall the past is specifically structured is itself a desirable fact to know about the mental life under investigation.

The act of writing, especially if a questionnaire-guide is followed, places an implicit conceptualization upon a case. Such card-stacking is particularly dangerous in nomothetic research which, by its standard instructions, may put into each life the uniform dimensions that it takes out. But the danger of card-stacking is met likewise in idiographic research where the writer follows a predetermined guide. There is no satisfactory answer to this dilemma, though if the writer is given maximum freedom we may *hope* that he will of his own accord make the implicit conceptualization most suitable to his case.

Blumer has made clear that many different conceptuali-

zations might have fitted the documents employed by Thomas and Znaniecki. The same may be said of all psychological research as well. Although arbitrariness of conceptualization for the present document is the rule, psychologists just as frequently interpret experimental facts according to contrasting theories, and so the dilemma is not in the least peculiar to the personal document.

Concrete psychology aided by the personal document prevents analysis and ablation of subject matter from running an artificial course. It offsets the layman's objection that psychology piles abstraction upon abstraction with little regard for the actual personal life. Behavioral observation can serve as the basis of concrete science up to a point, but only the personal document will serve in the region of subjective meaning. To both the student and the teacher, documents are a touchstone of reality.

Neither the organismic nor the longitudinal view is easily achieved without personal documents and these are now admitted to be an indispensable supplement to the psychometric and experimental approaches to human personality.

Even the severest critics of the personal document admit that it possesses value for giving hunches and initial leads for investigation. But we cannot admit that its value stops here. Authentic inductive research has been accomplished with multiple documents. The broader the generalizations reached, the larger the sample of documents required. For a generalization dealing with an occurrence so rare that it is found only in a single life, only the record of that life is required. The difference between nomothetic and iodiographic research lies in the coarseness and fineness of the generalizations sought. Approximations can be formulated that will hold for every mortal, or for large groups of mortals. But

when precision and refinement are desired, a specialized law in a personal form is demanded.

Some recent discussions of scientific method (and of the unity of science) have produced a ritualism that seems to say that the language of science is more important than its purposes. Our position, on the contrary, is that *if the language of personal documents can be shown to enhance understanding, power of prediction, and power of control, above the level which man can achieve through his own unaided common sense, then these documents must be admitted as a valid scientific method.* No loyalty to an operational, to logical, or mathematical creed should prevent it.

It can be shown that these critical tests of science are met by personal documents properly handled. Acquaintance with the particular case, a sense of its patterned character and its individualized laws of action, stand at the gateway of generalized knowledge and at its terminus at the point of application. Insight is a product of the interweaving of nomothetic and idiographic understanding. The positivist who dreads the subjectivity of the process of understanding needs as much as does the intuitionist to settle down to the task of finding out how his own mind, the most sensitive recording machine in existence, is capable of registering multiple variables and discerning relationships between them. That the technique of discerning is not beyond analysis has been demonstrated in a preliminary way.

Up to the present time, the emphasis upon *frequency* in social and psychological research has led the single investigator to study *many* cases in order to achieve what he considers valid understanding. Seldom do we find many investigators studying the same single case for the same purpose. The pooling of insights obtained from varying vantage grounds

(as in a case conference) is a method requiring further study. We know that when multiple investigators are involved the validity of the interpretations resulting may exceed their reliability (observer-agreement). This fact demands probing.

The tests of valid conceptualization include those of conformity with all facts, agreement among theorists, predictive power, subjective certainty, mental experimentation with the theory itself, and internal consistency of the interpretative scheme. Though such tests may eradicate the looser and more arbitrary types of theorizing they will not insure the derivation of one and only one finally valid conceptualization. Such perfection of inductive logic is never attained in any psychological research; it must not be expected in the field of personal documents. There will remain a diversity of charts by the aid of which human experience can be plotted. But so too, we note, in the science of geography there are various possible and equally valid projections by which maps of the earth may be drawn.

Once in a great while the conceptualization of a life seems sometimes to fit validly and without remainder into some existent system of psychological thought (Freudian, Marxist, Adlerian); more often a mixture of systems is required. Still more often, as the idiographic argument would hold, it seems desirable to seek an ad hoc conceptualization, one that lets the case speak entirely for itself, tell its own laws, dictate its own explanations. But such an ideal is not completely attainable since generalized knowledge inevitably enters into contemplation of any single case. At the same time, if the theorist employs all the sensitivity to the individual case of which he is capable, and draws upon a rich and eclectic knowledge of general principles, he is likely to achieve more valid insights and a "better fit" in his theorizing.

Recent studies in the prediction of personal adjustment

are for the most part based upon the assumption that if we find certain variables frequently present in marital success, in parole violation, or in juvenile delinquency, then the presence of enough of these variables in a new case will indicate likely success or failure. So long as *large* numbers of cases are concerned there is no flaw in the reasoning. But a non sequitur occurs when this logic gets twisted, as it sometimes does, and holds that if 10 per cent of the boys from a certain neighborhood become delinquent, then *this* boy who comes from that neighborhood has 10 chances in 100 of becoming delinquent. The truth of the matter would seem to be that from the point of view of a deterministic science the boy has either 100 per cent certainty of becoming delinquent or 100 per cent certainty of going straight. If all the causes were known we could predict for him perfectly (barring environmental accident), for his chances are determined by the pattern of his life in his own behavioral environment, and not by the frequencies found in the population at large. *Psychological causation is always personal and never actuarial.* For this reason case study prediction must in principle be expected to be more accurate. Such evidence as now exists shows this to be the case, although many more investigations on the point are desirable.

We have found it necessary to argue against the current view that attempts to order case study prediction *under* actuarial prediction, claiming that it is essentially a rough and inexact application of statistical reasoning. The logic of the position rests upon the contention that forecasting of future events must depend on one of two sets of circumstances: knowledge of the frequency of relations in the general population (pure actuarial prediction) or knowledge of the frequency of a given happening (under a certain instigation) in the past life of the individual. In either case we are told pre-

dictions depend on recurrence, upon past frequencies. While there is not the slightest doubt that such knowledge of the past is constantly employed in dealing with the single case, there are fallacies involved in *equating* the statistical form of prediction with prediction for the single case. (1) Good clinical predictors, like the man in the street, are certainly not conscious of quantifying their past experiences in terms of relative frequency in order to reach a prediction, and there is no *proof* that they do so unconsciously. The presumption against their doing so is great since we now know that frequency of association is not a sufficient explanation of the learning process or of human reasoning. (2) Modern psychology has shown that the perception of relations depends in large part upon external configuration, not upon past experience with elements within the configuration. This demonstration has forced into psychology a category of "belongingness" which has proved indispensable not only in the field of perception, but in learning and in reasoning as well. (3) Since in human life no two sets of successive circumstances are identical, we must utilize past behavior in connection with our present prediction only if we allow a wide latitude of *similarity*. The operation of insight cannot depend upon mechanical repetition and frequency, for there is, strictly speaking, no exact repetition. At most the past is brought into play if we judge it to be *relevant* and *similar* to the event we are forecasting. Relevance and similarity are subjective categories never successfully reduced to the recurrence of identical elements in two situations. And no method of mechanical sorting seems to be an adequate substitute for human judgments of causality. (4) Successful prediction often involves the forecasting of emergent changes (novel forms of behavior) on the basis of now latent trends which have shown little frequency and no actual intensity. Nor need the trends

in question be important in other lives where our experience has extended. Yet the predictor is often able to foresee that these trends will develop through interaction with other processes and circumstances in the life in question and perhaps eventually dominate the whole life. To weight past experience mechanically in such a case as this would be to lose an appreciation of the original and creative processes in the predictor's mental operations. Let us freely admit that past experience enters copiously into the predictive process; but let us admit likewise that the process of selecting, recasting, and recreating this past experience is involved in the ad hoc prediction from the case study. Such selecting, recasting, and recreating are not present in the simplified rationale of statistical operations.

It is not necessary for the dispute here indicated to proceed forever on an abstract plane. Research can help settle the issues. We should soon establish once and for all whether case study prediction at its best is, as here claimed, superior to actuarial prediction at its best. Some value may be expected, likewise, from future phenomenological studies of the mental process of forecasting. How does the successful layman go at his predictions; how does the social scientist? What personal qualifications make a good predictor good, and a bad predictor bad? Why is it that counselors refuse to rely on sorting machines for making their predictions?

In employing the personal document we throw a bridge between science and common sense. We make the instrument of the latter an instrument of the former. But since science aims always to improve upon common sense, it must sharpen this instrument. Casual and uncritical use must give way to improvements, many of which are now known and available. But to give up personal documents altogether, to deny them any value except for their yield in initial hunches, is to take

a step backward. If psychological and social science are to win their race with common sense—and they have not yet done so—they must employ every means at their disposal, including the basic (improved) procedures of common sense itself.

The case for personal documents rests finally upon their utility in *control.* It is obvious that scarcely any clinician or counselor proceeds without recourse to his case materials. The arts of medicine, social work, psychological guidance, demand them. And so the pragmatic justification for the method is met. The future promises an even wider utilization of personal documents as indices of what the common man wants and requires. The aspiration of democracy is to foster the integrity of each individual. Mass investigations have a way of taking attention away from this supreme aim. In proportion as psychological and social science pay more attention to the integrity and functioning of individual lives, the greater will be their contribution to the support of the social philosophy that sustains free science and gives it its opportunity for service to mankind.

CONCLUSION

At the end of our summary it is fair to ask what are the leading lessons we have learned for a more successful use of personal documents in the psychological and social science of the future. Three, we think, are outstanding.

(1) Continued bold and radical experimentation should be encouraged. Since the critical use of documents is not two decades old, since most of the incisive and original experimentation with techniques is the product of the past five years, and since the range of uses of documents is still rapidly extending itself, it would be injurious in the extreme to discourage creative experiments whereby the techniques of

writing, of organizing data, of validation, of prediction, and of interpretation are explored in a systematic manner. These experiments if continued should eventually yield a fairly definite set of rules for the optimum use not only of first-person documents but of other types of case studies as well.

(2) Users of the method should be made aware of common pitfalls and should take such precautions as they can to safeguard their documents and their procedures against sampling errors, invalidity and unreliability, deliberate fraud, self-deception, errors of memory, injurious implicit conceptualization, and arbitrariness of final interpretation. In this monograph most of the safeguards now available are discussed; others will in time be discovered.

(3) Strong counter measures are indicated against theorists who damn the personal document with faint praise, saying that its sole merit lies in its capacity to yield hunches or to suggest hypotheses, or that the mental operations brought to bear upon the single case are merely a matter of incomplete and inadequate statistical reasoning. Although these points of view do reflect the prevailing empirical climate of our times, they fail to express more than a small part of the value of personal documents for social science. Properly used, such documents anchor a discipline in the bedrock of human experience, make the most of the predilective value of the single case in the normal process of human thought, exploit the idiographic principles of reasoning, and aid in meeting (more adequately than can unaided actuarial methods of work) the three critical tests of science: *understanding, prediction,* and *control.*

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